

NEW



EVERYTHING  
YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT



# ANCIENT EGYPT

THE INSIDE STORY OF THE ICONIC AFRICAN CIVILISATION

PLUS

- DEATH MASKS
- HIEROGLYPHS
- SLAVERY
- GODS

Digital  
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FOURTH  
EDITION

## CONQUERORS OF EGYPT

Alexander the Great,  
Napoleon, and more

## BUILDING THE PYRAMIDS

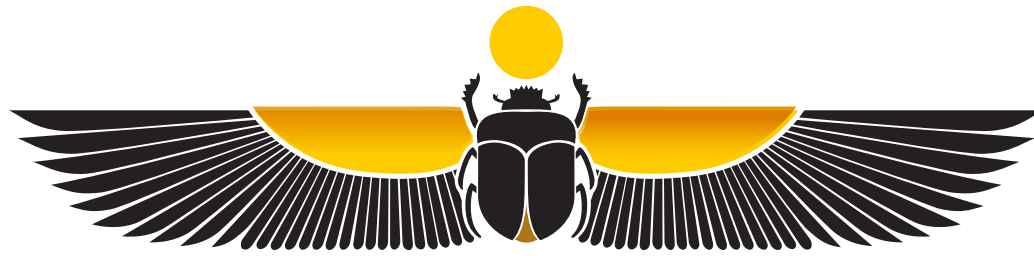
The architect behind the  
world's greatest wonder

## RULING PHARAOHS

Famous kings (and queens)  
and their reigns







# Welcome to ANCIENT EGYPT

The civilisation of Ancient Egypt has a long and storied history, and even today is still one of the most intriguing and beloved eras and places in the world. But what was life really like there? What was it like to live under the rule of the pharaohs, and how and why were their great pyramid tombs built? Who were the gods that the Ancient Egyptians believed in, and how did they worship them? Why was the river Nile so important to their civilisation? And why did so many conquerors want to take Egypt for themselves? Find out the answers to all these questions and more with this in-depth guide to everything you need to know about the Ancient Egyptians. Learn how their hieroglyphics were decoded and what that taught us about this incredible civilisation and its place in the ancient world and the modern imagination.

「 FUTURE 」



# EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT ANCIENT EGYPT

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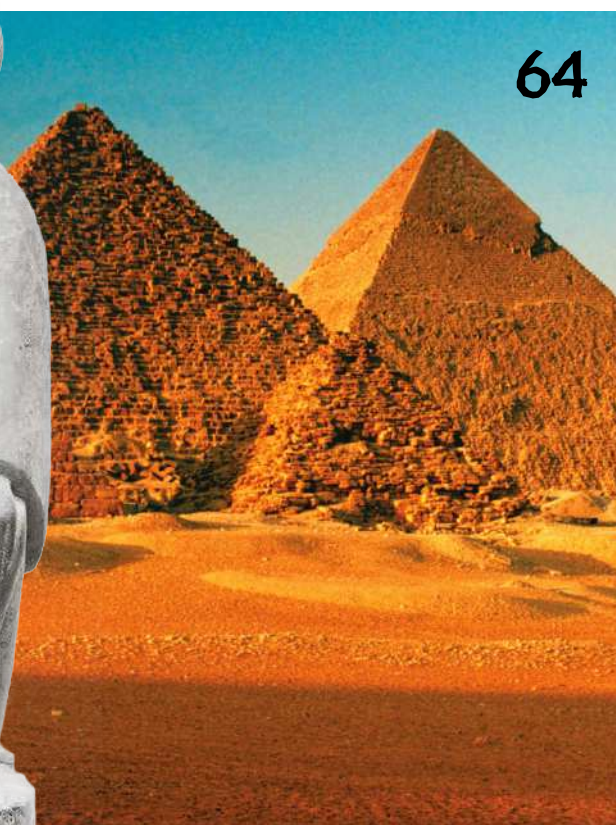
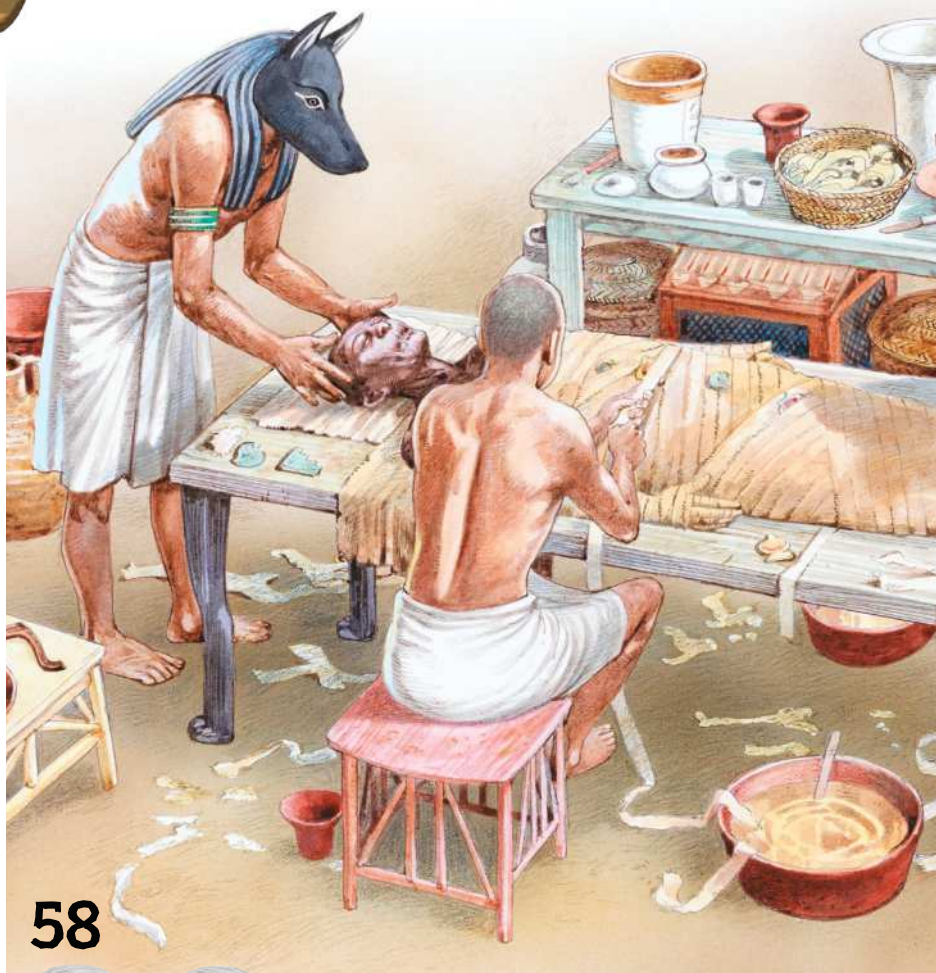
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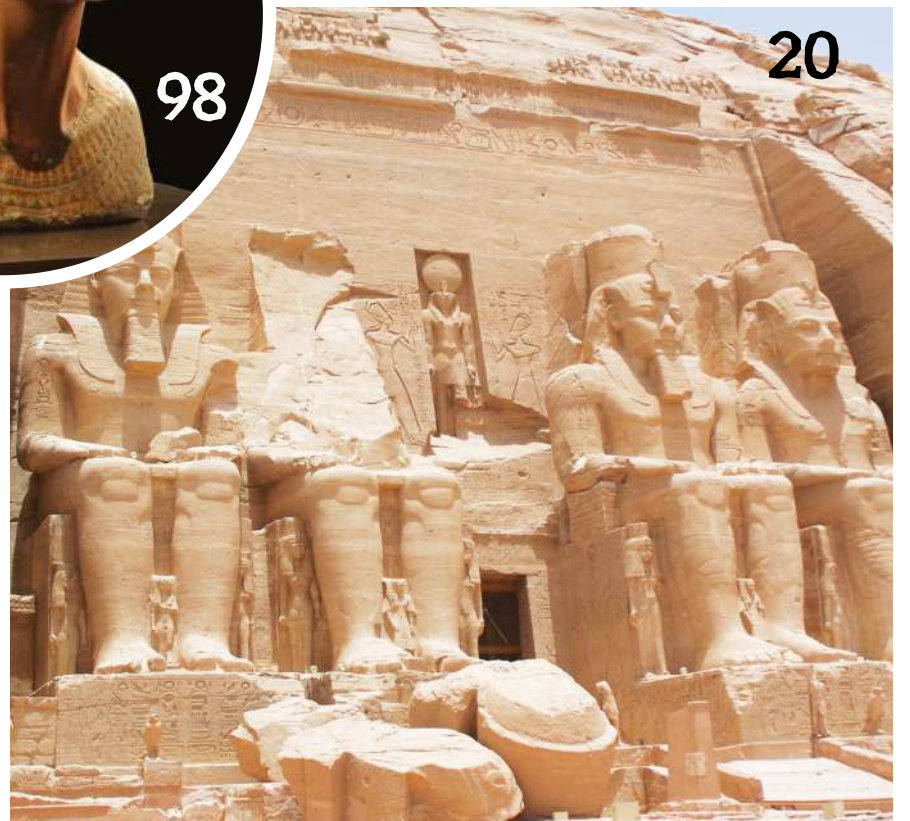
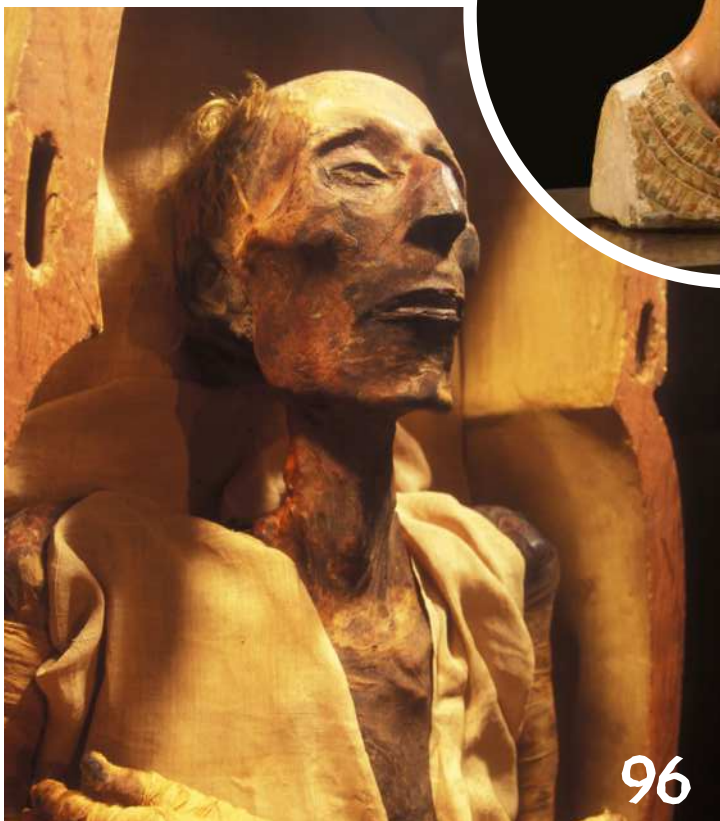
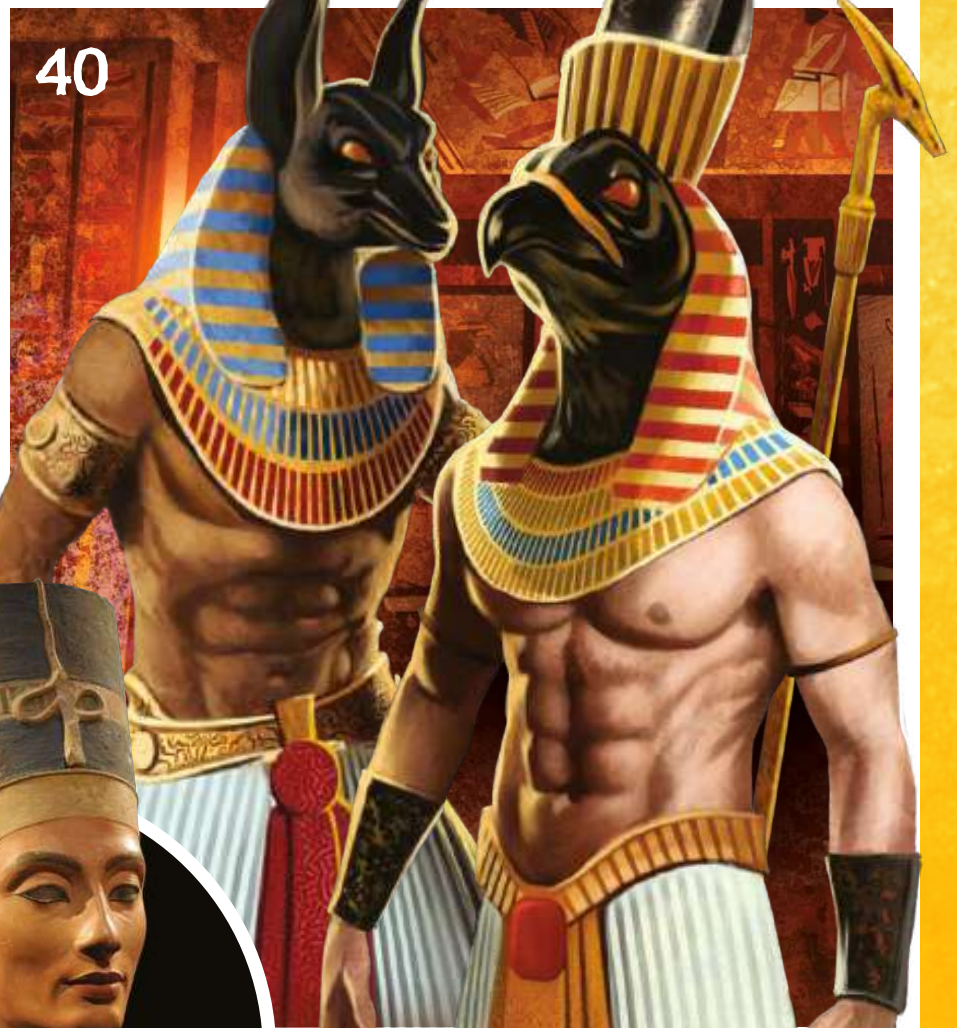
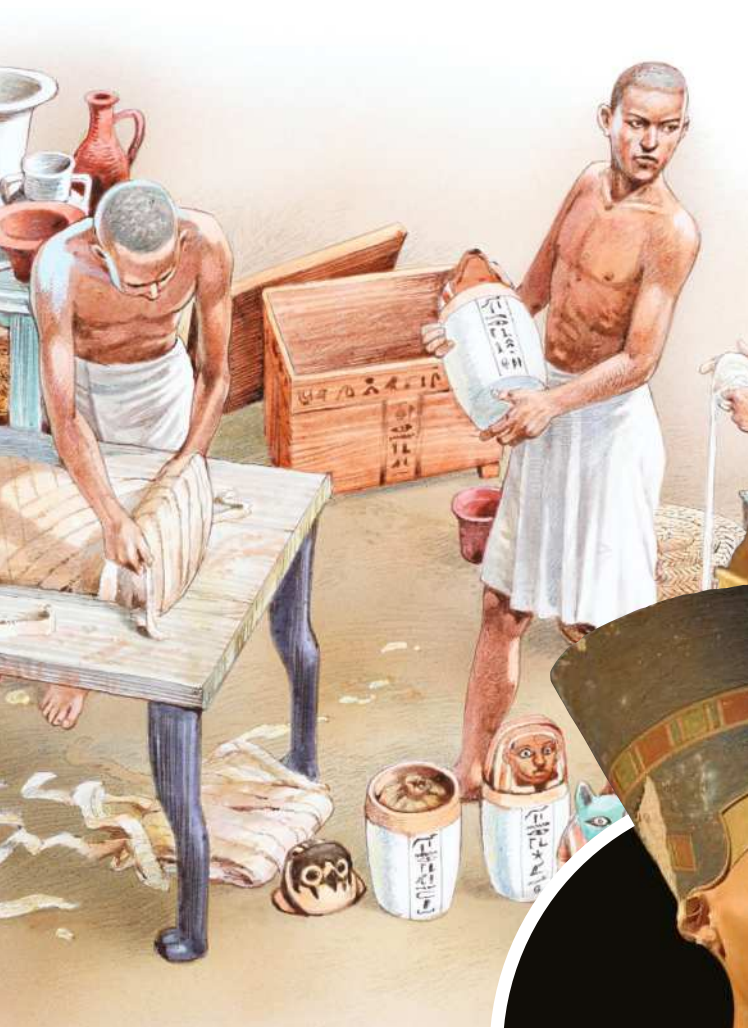


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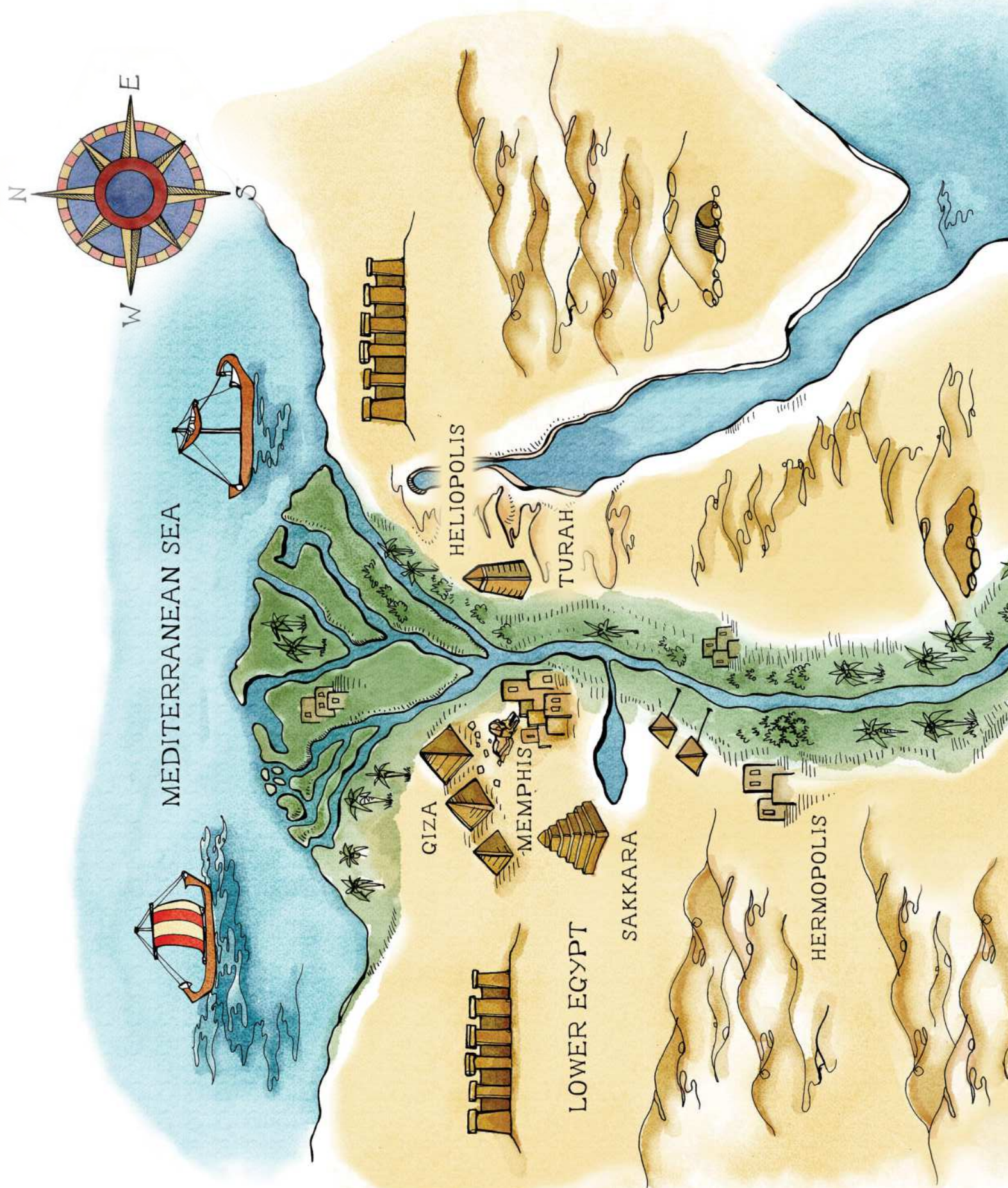
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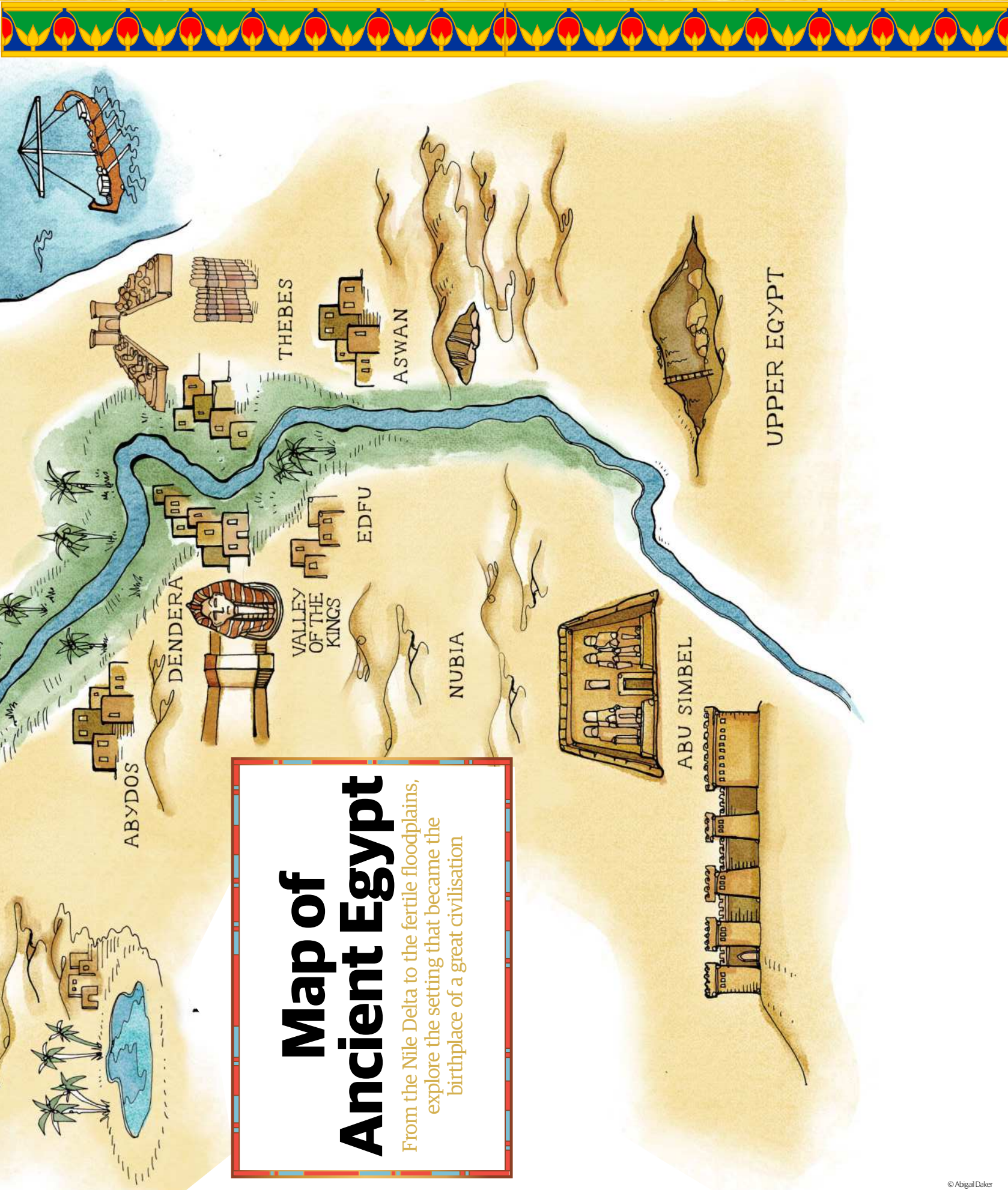
















# What did the Ancient Egyptians do for us?

An unimaginably advanced and well-educated society, the Ancient Egyptians were the brains behind inventions and discoveries that have prevailed into modern times

**T**he Ancient Egyptians' fascination with science and new technology resulted in inventions - such as the calendar and door lock - which are still used today. In some cases, their innovations combined form and function in quite beautiful ways.

Of a culture aware of its own processes and history, scholar Ian Shaw has commented that "The Egyptian sense of history is one in which rituals

and real events are inseparable - the vocabulary of Egyptian art and text very often makes no real distinction between the real and the ideal." The inventions and discoveries listed here indicate the modest and the more expansive ways in which the Ancient Egyptians pulled together the real and the ideal. From developments in personal hygiene, to projects as globally meaningful as the calendar or systems of astronomy, the Ancient Egyptians'

inventive spirit aided the development of human culture over several millennia. Since the early 19th century in particular, this has been a source of fascination. So, perhaps this is a society that should be regarded with gratitude for all that they accomplished. Of course, they did it for their own immediate benefit, but one wonders if, somewhere deep down, they had a sense that they were doing it for posterity, too.



# What did the Ancient Egyptians do for us?

## STONE COLUMNS

c. 2600 BCE

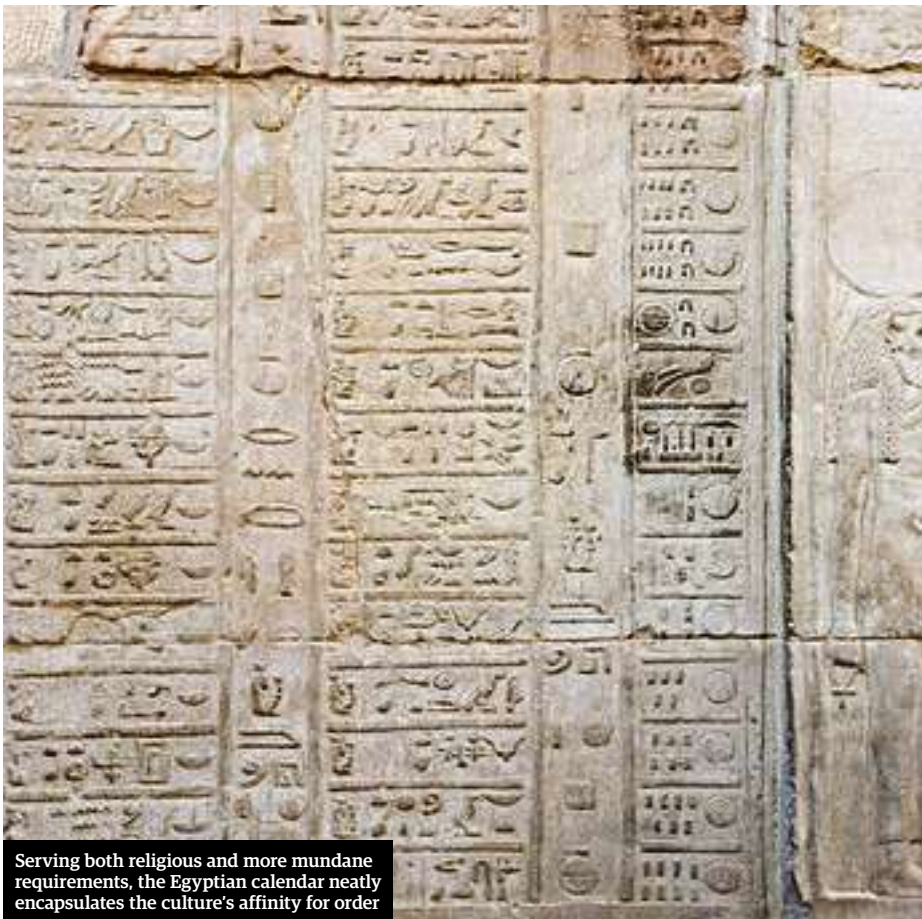
Ancient Egyptian culture excelled in the construction of immense public buildings, of which temples would have had a particular resonance for the populace. Ancient Egyptian architects and builders created what are probably now the oldest stone columns in the world. A testament to their structural integrity, these columns have endured and, while now standing as very beautiful ruins, they remain very visible reminders of the past.

Visit Karnak and you can still see the stone columns of the temple there. In addition to their practical purpose, they had a symbolic value. The stone columns of Egyptian architecture combined sturdy function with a delicate aesthetic sensibility wherein the capital (the uppermost part of the column) was typically carved to represent a papyrus reed or a lotus. The stone columns would have been brightly decorated.

The transmission of cultural particulars through travel in the ancient world is fascinating to consider. Would the Greeks who travelled to Egypt have been impressed by the architecture on display and taken tales of them back across the Mediterranean, from where it eventually crossed through Europe?

Cats were especially venerated in Ancient Egypt, being considered sacred animals. Some were even mummified

Standing like mighty sentinels, the stone columns perfectly integrated form and function



Serving both religious and more mundane requirements, the Egyptian calendar neatly encapsulates the culture's affinity for order

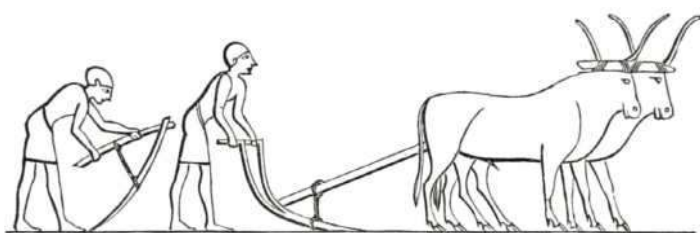
## TIME LORDS

c. 3000 BCE

It was Ancient Egyptian scholars who determined a year having a duration of 365 ¼ days. They divided this into 12 months. Each month comprised three weeks and each week comprised ten days. So, not quite the breakdown of units of time that we know now, but very close. They even added five extra days at the end of the calendar year. In fact, the Ancient Egyptians adhered to a solar calendar, and to a lunar calendar which predated the creation of the solar calendar. The calendar tied in not only with interests in festivals and religious observance, but also informed and made easier so much administrative work and accounting practice. During the Roman Empire's colonisation of Egypt, inevitable culture contact occurred and it was Julius Caesar who adjusted the calendar in around 46 BCE to add a leap year day. It is from the Egyptian solar calendar, amended with a few Roman adjustments, then, that our contemporary calendar takes its form, having initially been disseminated across Europe via the reach of the Roman Empire. Related to the invention of a calendar system was the Egyptians' development of a sun clock that operates similarly to a sundial.

**"It is from the Egyptian solar calendar that our contemporary calendar takes its form"**





## THE PLOUGH

c. 4000 BCE

An agricultural powerhouse, Ancient Egypt invented a very early form of the plough. Archaeological investigations have unearthed evidence of their ploughing technology such as one example that dates from 1550-1070 BCE that is in the collection at the British Museum. Because Egypt was not a particularly forested country, the toolmakers had limited choice in terms of the quality of the timber with which they could work with and fashion from. Yet, the prototypical plough illustrated the principle well enough for it to become widely used. Only modestly effective in 4000 BCE, the tool had no sophistication to it. However, by 2000 BCE, the plough was being attached to oxen. We encounter examples of Egyptian ploughs that archaeology has excavated, but it is in Ancient Egyptian artwork perhaps, on buildings and on artefacts that we get the best sense of the role of the plough across the essentially agricultural nation. Given how familiar the plough would eventually become, it seems astonishing to think that once upon a time there was a moment when it was the latest piece of farming technology available.



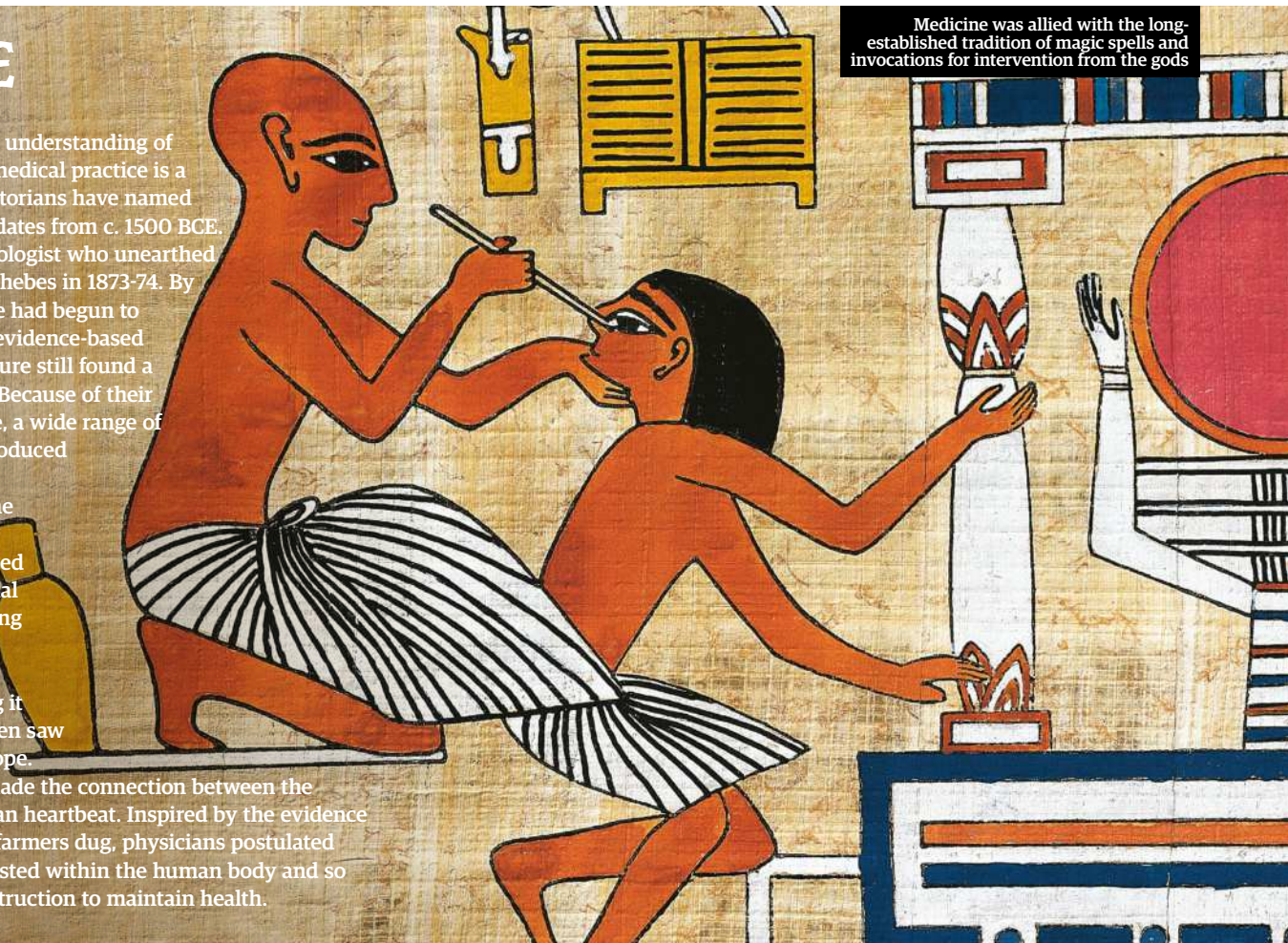
The plough transformed the possibilities of the agricultural economy. The process was refined and eventually drawn by cattle

## MEDICINE

c. 1500 BCE

A significant source for our understanding of the evolution of Egyptian medical practice is a papyrus document that historians have named *The Ebers Papyrus*, which dates from c. 1500 BCE. Ebers was a German Egyptologist who unearthed the papyrus document at Thebes in 1873-74. By 1000 BCE, Egyptian culture had begun to determine medicine as an evidence-based practice. That said, the culture still found a place for magic in healing. Because of their trading success as a culture, a wide range of plants and spices were introduced into Egypt by traders who had ventured far beyond the land around the river Nile. Egyptian physicians explored and established the potential of drugs and plants as having medicinal value. This work was then taken up by the Ancient Greeks who, taking it home from their travels, then saw it disseminated across Europe.

Egyptian doctors even made the connection between the human pulse and the human heartbeat. Inspired by the evidence of irrigation channels that farmers dug, physicians postulated that such channels also existed within the human body and so must be kept free from obstruction to maintain health.



Medicine was allied with the long-established tradition of magic spells and invocations for intervention from the gods



## EYE MAKEUP

c. 4000 BCE

Think of the actress Elizabeth Taylor as Cleopatra in the Hollywood movie of the same name. It makes for a fairly iconic movie image, and the emphasis on Taylor's eyes is an apt reminder of how important eye makeup was for the Ancient Egyptians, who believed it could protect against evil by magically summoning the protective power of the gods Horus and Ra. Men and women in Ancient Egypt liked their eye makeup very much - indeed, the more of it, the better. Perhaps unsurprisingly, eye makeup was an indicator of an individual's social status: the more you wore, the higher up the social pyramid you were. Eye makeup (*kohl*) combined soot and a mineral called galena. It's a look that has remained hugely popular. We know about the importance of eye makeup thanks to the material culture of Ancient Egypt: in extant documents and on other artefacts such as public art and jewellery, too, such as a gold bracelet from the tomb of 22nd Dynasty pharaoh Shoshenq II.



Heavily applied eyeliner was partially about showing social status, but was also indicative of an interest in beauty

**"They concocted a recipe comprising rock salt, mint, dried iris flower and pepper"**

## PERSONAL HYGIENE

Because Ancient Egyptian bread contained grit, over time it could do damage to the enamel on people's teeth. Two inventions were eventually produced in an attempt to counteract this problem: for a toothbrush, wooden twigs had their ends frayed to form a brush-like surface. To make their toothpaste, the orthodontically interested Ancient Egyptians concocted a fascinating recipe consisting of rock salt, mint, dried iris flower and pepper.

It's certainly the case that an interest in personal cleanliness and good personal presentation, which we rather take for granted today, characterised the Ancient Egyptian sensibility. Hair was largely considered unhygienic, so the more hair you had on your head, the further down the social ladder you were.

Rotating shaving razors were used from around 1550-1292 BCE. Men and women shaved their heads and wore wigs instead as their own hair was considered unclean

The Egyptians liked aphorisms: 'An answer is profitable in proportion to the intensity of the quest'



Locking mechanisms were technically sturdy, but the keys were large. Some of the biggest were up to 2 feet (0.6 metres) long

"The tumbler lock system was hugely sophisticated for the time"



## THE DOOR LOCK

c. 4000 BCE

Cumbersome though Egyptian locks were due to their significant weight and size, they were among the earliest versions of the technology that we so take for granted now.

Archaeology has unearthed tumbler locks dating back to 4000 BCE. While they may not have quite invented it, Ancient Egyptians proved the usefulness of the technology. From Egypt, the door lock travelled into Europe with those Greeks who had visited Egypt and then returned home.

The tumbler lock system was hugely sophisticated for the time and it certainly instilled a new sense of security for an Egyptian's property - and indeed their very own welfare. The Egyptian lock was made with a hollowed bolt that was fixed to a door which was connected to pins. Each specific lock had a particular arrangement of pins so as to avoid duplicates being made. Hence the use of a key. Inserting the key into the lock caused the pins to lift up and so the door would open. In Ancient Egypt, lock and key were both made of wood.



Since each lock had a unique arrangement of pins, it required the correct key to open it



## BOAT BUILDING

c. 3000 BCE

As a river culture, with the sea in close proximity, the Ancient Egyptians advanced the science and art of boat building that became so important to the Mediterranean peoples. Seafaring ship ruins have been excavated at Wadi Gawasis and Ayn Sokhna, and they demonstrate the skill and precision that the Egyptians brought to naval industry. As far back as 3000 BCE, at Abydos, planked wooden boats were being made. Significantly, the Ancient Egyptians used thick planks in their boat construction. The planks were held in place by mortise-and-tenon fastenings. Of their refined approach to boat-craft, archaeologist Cheryl Ward explains, "Egyptian-built craft are recognisably different from those of other cultures and demonstrate consistency in philosophy and detail over a 2,500-year span." Much of our understanding of the role of boats and seafaring in Ancient Egypt comes to us via hieroglyphs on tablets. As in other situations, it seems not unreasonable to suggest that visitors from further afield, particularly from the Mediterranean, would have witnessed the skill with seafaring and river navigation and carried the information back home with them.

A model recreating the style of boat that was built during the period



## FRACTIONS

c. 1800 BCE

We might well take mathematics for granted, including fractions, despite the head-scratching that can ensue whenever we encounter them. To the Ancient Egyptians, however, we can say 'thank you' for the elegant art of the fraction.

Our knowledge of the development and use of fractions in the Ancient Egyptian world of mathematics is derived from a papyrus scroll that was found in a tomb in Thebes. Having subsequently been bought by a Scot named Henry Rhind in a market in Luxor in 1858, the scroll then found its way to the British Museum in London in 1864 upon Rhind's death.

Deciphered in 1842, the *Rhind Mathematical Papyrus* revealed a highly consistent system of fractions that allowed the agricultural society of Ancient Egypt to plan the farming cycle. Sure enough, the system of fractions also found a role in planning for building projects, accountancy and paying wages. Egyptian fractions operate somewhat differently to the system of fractions that we may know from school.

**"A highly consistent system of fractions allowed Ancient Egyptians to plan the farming cycle"**





## ASTRONOMY

c. 4000 BCE

Back in 2000, British Egyptologist Dr Kate Spence proposed a theory for the way in which the architects of the time managed to align the pyramids with such accuracy. Dr Spence details that degree of precision: "The Great Pyramid is extremely accurately aligned towards north. The sides deviate from true north by less than three arc minutes - that's less than a 20th of a degree - which is extremely accurate in terms of orientation."

What Dr Spence's theory underscored was the faculty of the Ancient Egyptians to embrace and exploit the discipline of astronomy as a means of navigation and orientation. The Greek historian Herodotus commented in his work *The Histories* that "the Egyptians were the first of all men on Earth to find out the course of the year, having divided the seasons into 12 parts to make up the whole; and this they said they found out from the stars..."

From the Egyptians, modern astronomy was able to develop a more refined sense of the repeating, cyclical patterns of the stars and planets in the night sky. They named stars, and their work with astronomy also informed the creation of an astrological system. Archaeology again has unearthed much material culture that records the commonly held fascination with the night sky.

In their fascination with the Sun, the society's commitment to architecture combined to create the temples at Abu Simbel and Qsar Qarum, in which the sunlight aligns with details of sculpture at certain times.

**"Archaeology has unearthed much material culture that records the Ancient Egyptian fascination with the sky"**

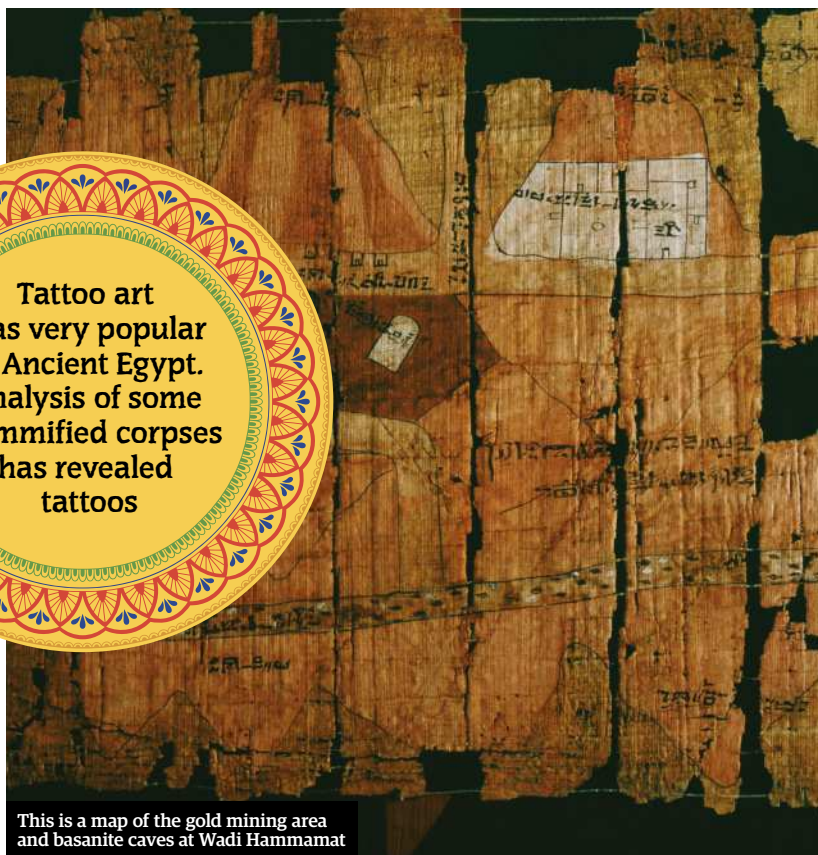


## GOLD MINING

c. 3100 BCE

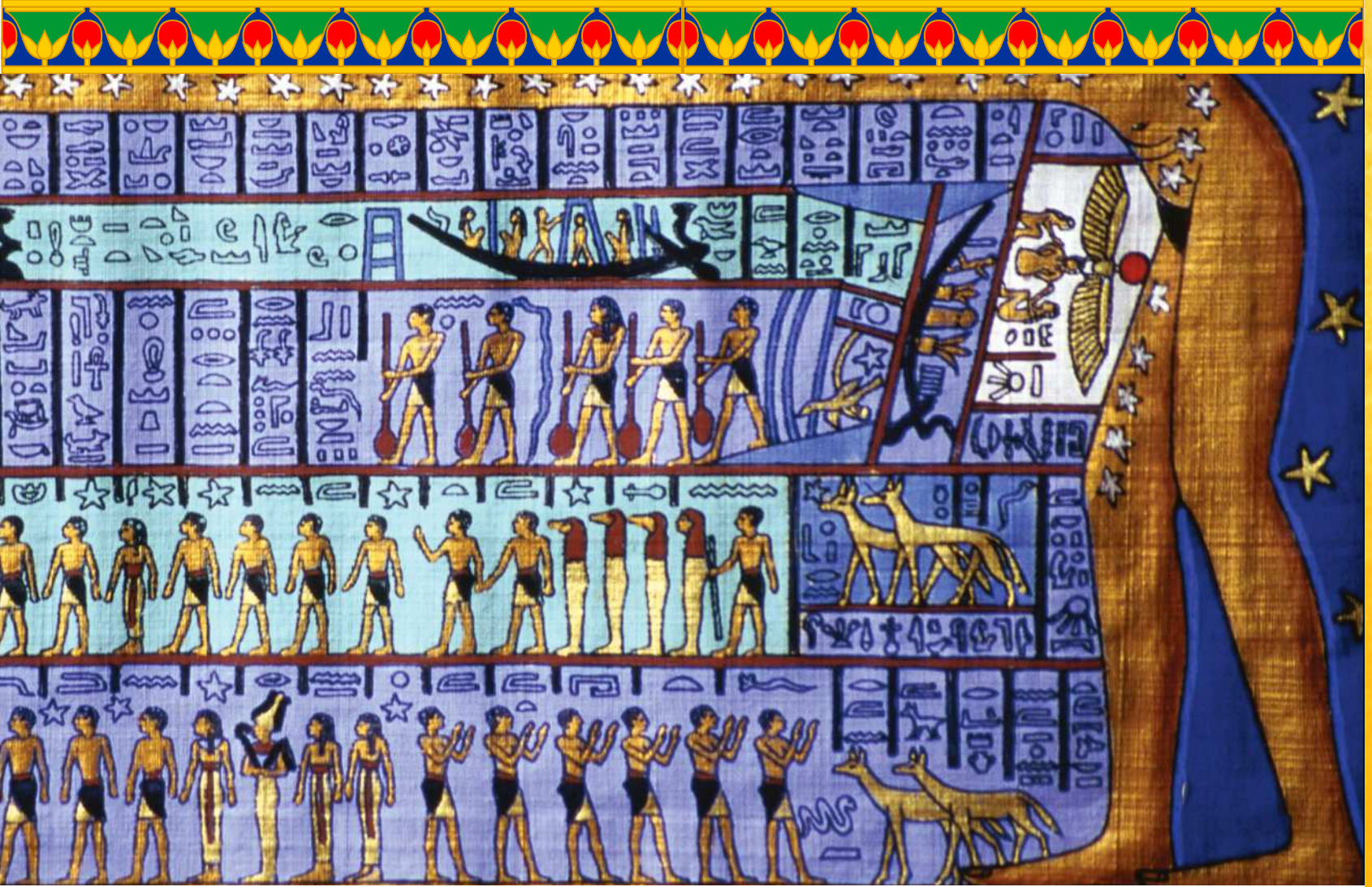
Gold mining has long been a globally significant industry and, as in many other things, we have the Ancient Egyptians to thank for the example of this work. One of our main sources for insights into Egyptian mining practice is found in the writings of Diodorus Siculus, the Greek historian. The Egyptian terrain was rich in a range of minerals and resources, and gold was one such naturally occurring treasure. As far back as the fourth millennium BCE, the Egyptian people were beginning to access gold via alluvial deposits. Then, as of around 3100 BCE, engineers developed efficient and productive mining operations that were located in the mountain range east of Coptos and also in the south in Nubia. Consistent with so much else in their sense of the immediate and the eternal, the Ancient Egyptians connected the real practicalities of the world with their religious system: they considered gold to be the flesh of Ra, the Sun god. Because Ra was an undying deity, gold too became a talisman of sorts, embodying eternal life.

**"Ancient Egyptians considered gold to be the flesh of Ra, the Sun god"**





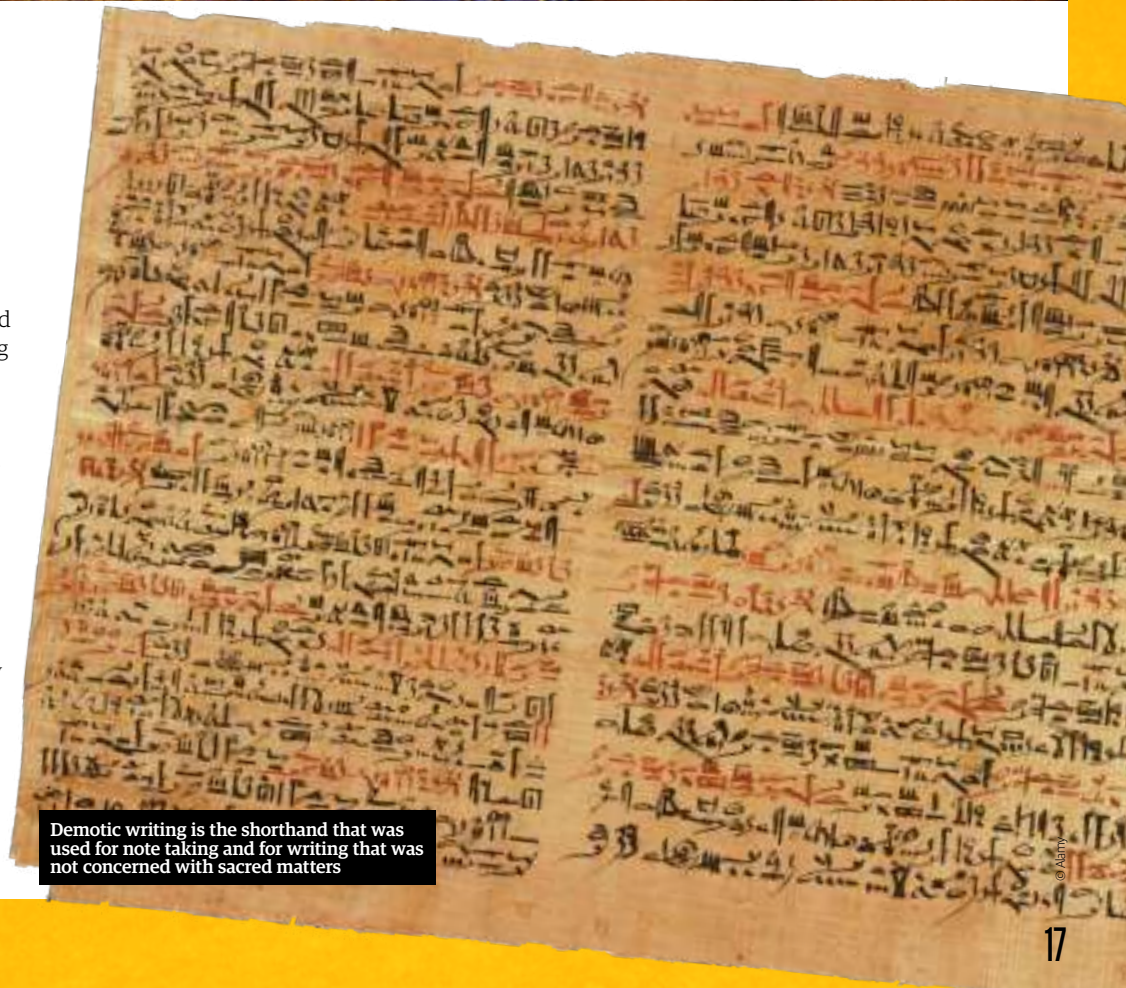
# What did the Ancient Egyptians do for us?



## WRITING

c. 3200 BCE

For the people of Ancient Egypt, their belief was that Thoth, the god of wisdom, had bestowed on them the ability to write. 'Hieroglyph' is a word that comes to us from Ancient Greece and it means 'sacred carvings'. Hieroglyphs used over 700 signs. There was also a complementary form of shorthand script typically used for writing on papyrus. For this ancient culture, writing was certainly a way to record the history of the royal rulers. Other subjects committed to written memory were spells. Egypt was a culture that, to some degree, combined an affinity for magic with an affinity for the world of reason, evidence and investigation. Alongside their spells and incantations, history and decrees, Egyptian writing also contributed to the recording of poetry such as *The Tale of Sinhue*. The Rosetta Stone has become a globally recognised archaeological treasure that permitted scholars to begin investigating the material culture of Ancient Egypt that archaeology would uncover. After several thousand years, we 'suddenly' find ourselves able to understand what their notations discussed and described. The Ancient Egyptians also deployed their writing system as a means of developing a consistent bureaucracy; it's an example we've all learnt from.



Demotic writing is the shorthand that was used for note taking and for writing that was not concerned with sacred matters



# Ancient Egypt, 3300-30 BCE



The pyramids in Giza form part of the Giza Necropolis, which also contains the Sphinx

## The Age of the Pyramids

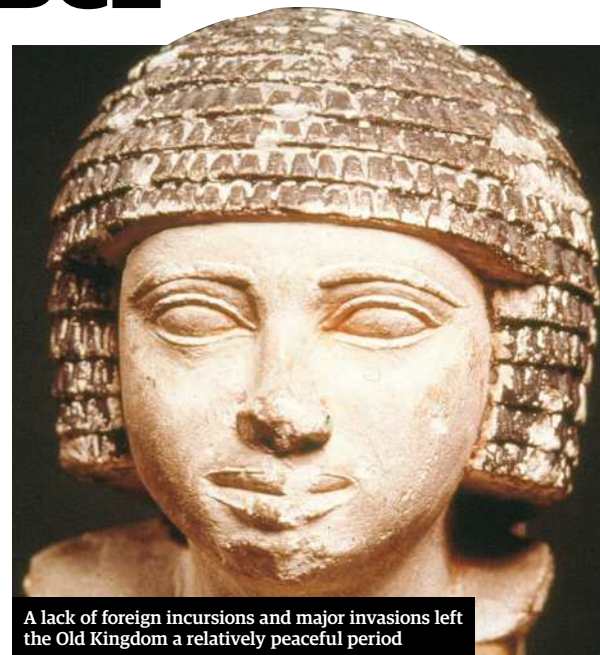
2700 BCE - 2200 BCE

Ancient Egypt saw a number of phases of pyramid building, but those built during the third and fourth dynasties became the most iconic. Built almost solely as pharaohs' tombs, the most famous are in Giza: the Great Pyramid of Giza (Pyramid of Khufu), the Pyramid of Menkaure and the smaller Pyramid of Khafre. These colossal structures, built between 2560 BCE and 2510 BCE, are part of Seven Wonders of the World and stand as a testament to the ingenuity of Ancient Egyptian society and culture.

## The Golden Age

2613 BCE - 2494 BCE

The Fourth Dynasty is often referred to as the Golden Age, when the entire nation benefited from a boom in arts and culture. The relative peace of the previous dynasties continued, enabling the pharaohs of the era to realise their architectural aspirations. The Old Kingdom (the third to sixth dynasties) is often referred to as the Age of the Pyramids; almost every ruler had a pyramid tomb constructed in their honour. Such structures would have required huge work forces, with many Egyptologists believing a complex form of government must have been created to organise them.



A lack of foreign incursions and major invasions left the Old Kingdom a relatively peaceful period

### First hieroglyphics used

Hieroglyphics are first used by the many tribes and peoples of Egypt during the Predynastic period.

3300 BCE



Hieroglyphics continued to be used up until the fourth century CE

### The Old Kingdoms

During the fourth to eighth dynasties, the Great Pyramids are erected in Dahshur and Giza. They are considered one of the Seven Wonders.

2575-2150 BCE

### Rejuvenation of the Faiyum

Much of the Egyptians' longevity comes from the successful implementation of agriculture - Faiyum is a main site for this.

1900 BCE



Agriculture was a cornerstone of Ancient Egypt

### Rise of Thebes

For years, Memphis has remained the largest hub of the Egyptian realm, but Thebes has now become the largest and most populous city.

1800 BCE

### Hyksos raiders invade

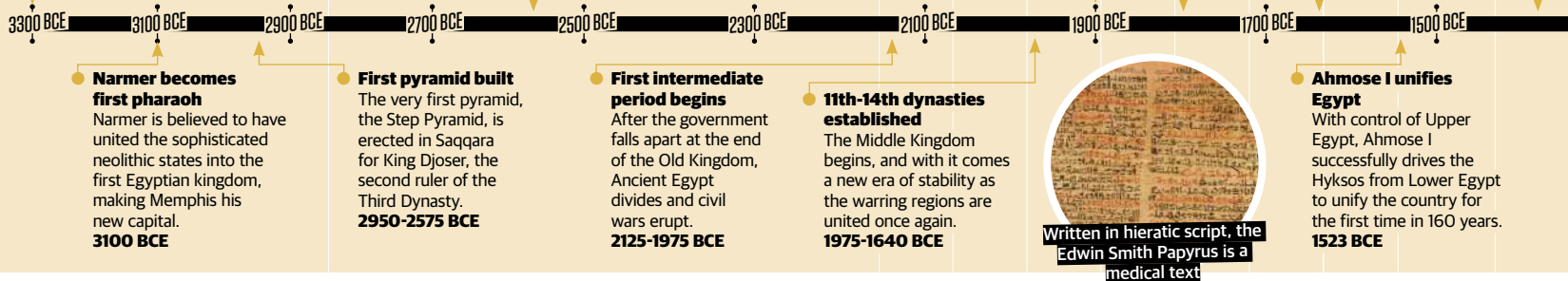
Hyksos raiders (a Semitic people from Asia) invade the Delta. They establish themselves and eventually introduce the chariot.

1630 BCE

### King Thutmose III rises to power

One of the most powerful and long-lasting rulers, Thutmose III's many successful military campaigns bring new wealth to Egypt.

1400 BCE

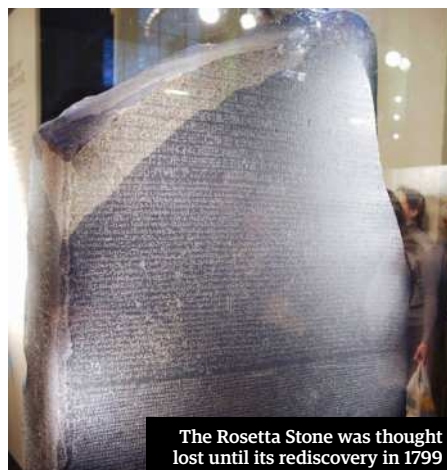


The Hyksos influence had a big effect on Egyptian warfare

## The Hyksos rule over Egypt

1650 BCE - 1550 BCE

It is estimated that the invading Hyksos warriors remained in power for 100 to 160 years. From a region of Western Asia known as Canaan, they took advantage of civil unrest among the Egyptian states and conquered Lower Egypt. The 15th Dynasty saw the introduction of chariots and composite bows, as well as new advances in pottery and agriculture.



The Rosetta Stone was thought lost until its rediscovery in 1799

## Rosetta Stone is carved

Commissioned and carved during the reign of Ptolemy V, the Rosetta Stone is a relic of huge historic importance. It was written in two languages (Egyptian and Greek) to reflect the two main bloodline dynasties of Egyptian history, and three separate scripts (hieroglyphic, demotic and Greek) to represent the vast cultural cross-section of the kingdom. Used as a religious document at the time, the Rosetta Stone has proved invaluable in helping modern linguists understand the use of language in Ancient Egypt.



## The Amarna Revolution

1370 BCE

Setting aside foreign invasions and occupations, some of the biggest upheavals endured by Ancient Egyptians came from within and systematically altered the very fabric of society. The Amarna Revolution, which saw the pharaoh King Amenhotep IV outlaw the polytheistic practices that influenced everything from art to religion in favour of worshipping a single god, was one such upheaval. When Amenhotep IV inherited the throne from his father, he took the name Akhenaten, moved the country's capital to present-day Tel el Amarna and began defacing temples across the land. Such a central focus on domestic changes caused a great deal of territory in Asia to be lost.



The revolution came to an end when Tutankhamun inherited the throne, returning Egypt to polytheism

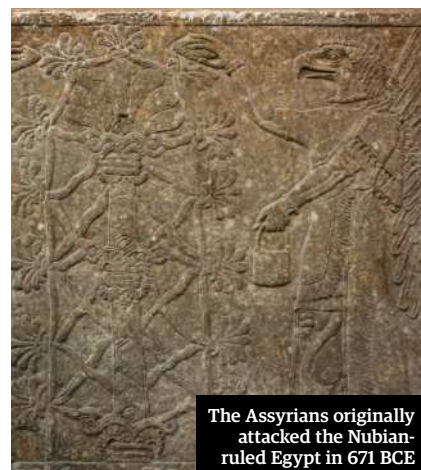
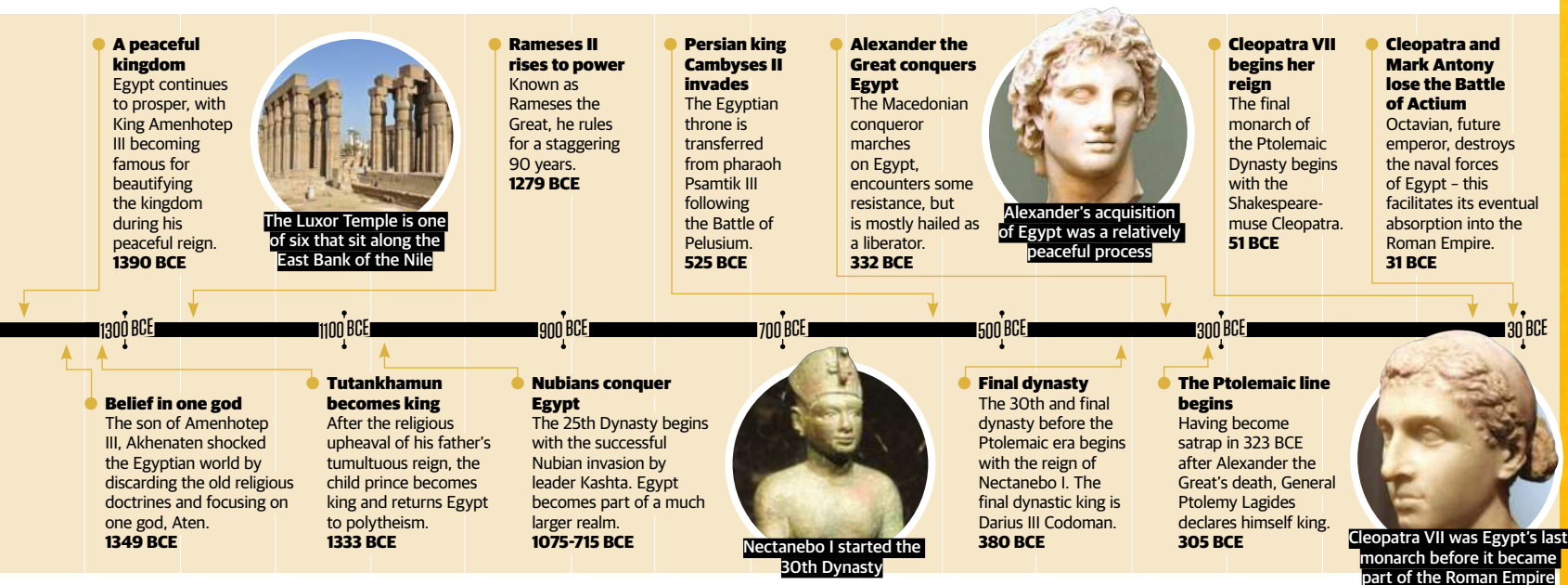
## The rule of the Greeks

332 BCE - 30 BCE

The arrival of Alexander the Great, a Macedonian conqueror and member of the Argead Dynasty, changed Ancient Egypt forever in 332 BCE. It brought about the end of the classical Egyptian dynasties (which had numbered 30) and altered everything from laws to education and culture. By the time of Alexander's arrival in Egypt, the nation was under Persian rule and its leaders had no desire to go to war with the vengeful Greek king, so control of the country was handed over peacefully. Under a new Ptolemaic Dynasty (beginning with Ptolemy I, naturally), Egypt received something of a rejuvenation now that it formed part of the Alexandrian Empire.



Following Alexander's death, Ptolemy Lagides became the new satrap of Egypt



The Assyrians originally attacked the Nubian-ruled Egypt in 671 BCE

## Era of foreign rule

728 BCE - 332 BCE

The history of the Egyptian throne is a multicultural affair. For all the pharaohs who could call the land on which they ruled their homeland, there were others who simply invaded and took the entire country, or a major portion of it for themselves. The biggest successive period of foreign rule started with the invasion by Nubian King Piye in 728 BCE. The Nubians were then driven out by Assyrians in 669 BCE, followed by the arrival of the Persians in 525 BCE.

Gaius Octavius eventually become Emperor Augustus of Rome

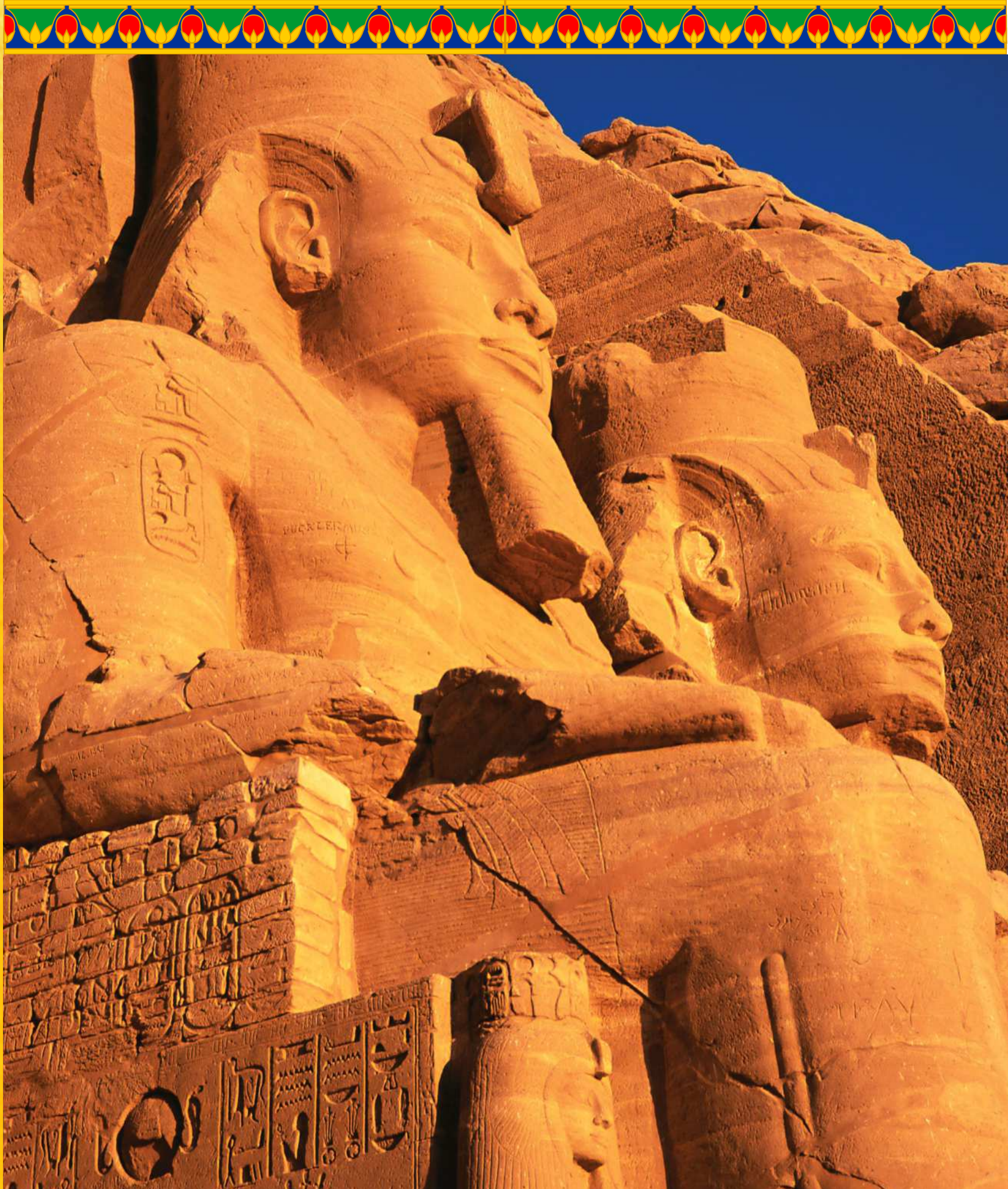


## Battle of Actium

31 BCE

When Roman general-turned-politician Marc Antony married queen Cleopatra VII, it seemed the two nations would finally be united. However, following the assassination of Julius Caesar, Rome was in turmoil. With the Republic failing, Caesar's maternal great nephew Gaius Octavius challenged the might of Cleopatra's naval fleet in 31 BCE. His forces crushed it, eventually leading to Egypt's assimilation into the newly formed Roman Empire.







# The kingdoms of Ancient Egypt

Spanning many eras, the New, Middle and Old Kingdoms would see the pharaohs reach the peak of their power and Egyptian culture soar

**F**or 3,000 years, the ancient Egyptian empire endured. It emerged, like so many other independent kingdoms, from the ruins of warring and fragmented fiefdoms and grew into a nation that shook North Africa and the surrounding world to its core. It became an epicentre for culture and religion, where science and magic were intertwined as one. But those golden ages, those heights of human achievement that challenged even those of Greece and Rome at their peaks, were not achieved in a day.

Before the Assyrians came, before the Persians invaded, before the Greeks conquered and the Romans annexed, the Egyptians rose and fell all by themselves. While darker periods would form between them (three in fact, known as the Intermediate Periods), the timeline of ancient Egypt has been defined by three distinct eras: the Old Kingdom, the Middle Kingdom and the New Kingdom. A time of cultural rebirth and monumental construction, it was during the Old Kingdom that iconic structures

that have endured millennia were built. The Middle Kingdom was when a nation was unified and forged anew. Then the realm was aggressively expanded and culture fostered like never before in the New Kingdom.

Ancient Egypt wasn't just an era of military conquest and expansion, it was a time of innovation too. The Egyptians invented early

forms of cosmetics, including eye makeup; they were one of the first civilisations (alongside Mesopotamia) to evolve a robust written language; they created papyrus thousands of years before the Chinese produced paper; they

designed the basic calendar structure that we still use today; they can even lay claim to inventing bowling and early forms of breath mints.

In short, they were a nation the like of which we've never seen before or again. Gods, pharaohs, pyramids, mummification, agriculture and much more helped to define the ancient Egyptians as one of human history's most fascinating and intelligent civilisations.

**“When it came to the New Kingdom, the building of pyramids was considered unfashionable”**



## FAMOUS FACES THROUGH TIME

Uncover the celebrities of each kingdom of this great civilisation

### THE OLD KINGDOM

**Djoser c.2670 BCE**



Of all the kings that ruled Egypt in the infant years of the Old Kingdom, the pharaoh Djoser is perhaps the most influential. He may not have been the man who united Egypt as one like Narmer, but he typified

two characteristics that would go on to define ancient Egypt. He conducted military campaigns that solidified and expanded the borders of the empire while nurturing the growth of his nation's culture. He also commissioned the first pyramid on Egyptian soil; the Step Pyramid at Sakkara was the blueprint for pharaonic splendour and inspired future generations to build even greater examples.

### THE MIDDLE KINGDOM

**Mentuhotep II 2061-10 BCE**



The kingdom splintered after the prosperity and expansion of the Old Kingdom. This mini dark age of sorts was known as the First Intermediate Period and saw Egypt divided by two competing dynasties. Lower Egypt

was controlled by the Tenth Dynasty and Upper Egypt by the Theban Dynasty. About 14 years into his reign, Mentuhotep II had grown tired of the stalemate and attacked the Lower Egypt capital of Herakleopolis. He eventually broke the rival dynasty, unified the two realms and effectively founded the era now known as the Middle Kingdom.

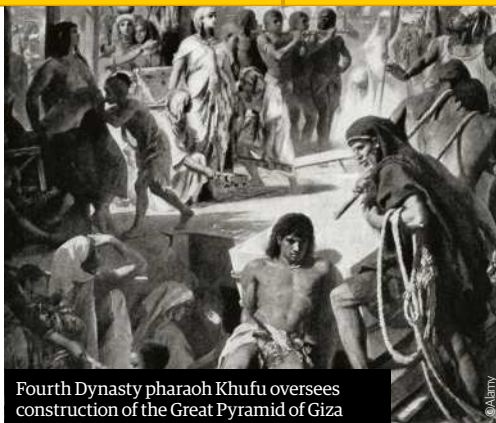
### THE NEW KINGDOM

**Ramesses II 1279-13 BCE**



Tutankhamun may be the most recognisable pharaoh, but King Tut's reign was a speck of Egyptian sand compared the power, influence and achievement of Ramesses II. The third pharaoh of the 19th Dynasty,

Ramesses II took an already prosperous kingdom and made it greater and grander than it had ever been. He expanded its borders, conquering Canaan and subduing everyone from the Nubians to the peoples of the Levant. He was also a prolific builder of monuments and temples, and even went as far as constructing his very own capital city, Pi-Ramesses.



Fourth Dynasty pharaoh Khufu oversees construction of the Great Pyramid of Giza



Tomb art from the Old Kingdom



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## THE OLD KINGDOM

A time of rebirth, the Old Kingdom saw the introduction of the first pharaoh, dynasty and pyramid to the world

**P**rior to the Old Kingdom, in an era known as the Predynastic, Prehistoric or Protodynastic Period, Egypt was going through something of a transformation. What would become the nation of Egypt was divided into colonies, each with their own lords and rulers. The north and south of the country were also very distinct in both practices and culture, with the city of Hierakonpolis the capital of the south and Bes the capital of the north.

Excavations over the last century have radically changed the way we view Egypt prior to the Old Kingdom, including the fact that the First Dynasty and the rise of Narmer was not an overnight process. Upper Egypt, the more affluent of the two states, had three main cities - Thinis, Nekhen and Naqada. One by one, these states conquered one another or merged, and by about 3100 BCE, Egypt emerged as one whole state with the warrior pharaoh Narmer at its head. Two dynasties followed this founding during a period known as the Early Dynastic Period, and it was here that the blueprint for the Old Kingdom was forged. Memphis became the capital and Abydos the religious epicentre. Even architecture and the arts began to approach the classical Egyptian form at

this time. The Old Kingdom began in about 2686 BCE, with the formation of the Third Egyptian Dynasty. The term 'Old Kingdom' was introduced by 18th-century historians and is used broadly to signify the first of three peaks of Egyptian civilisation. Often referred to as the 'Age of the Pyramids', the Old Kingdom saw Egypt nurture every aspect that would make it great. From the Third Dynasty and its first pharaoh, Djoser, to the apparent last king of the Sixth, Netjerikare Siptah, the nation was transformed into a cultural and military powerhouse.

The pyramids are a symbol of this era, and the template for these monumental icons began in the reign of Djoser. His vizier and closest adviser, Imhotep (who would be deified in generations to come as a demigod and god of healing) was the architect behind the Pyramid of Djoser, and his designs were a significant leap in engineering in ancient Egypt. Prior to Djoser, kings were buried in rectangular, flat-roofed tombs called mastabas, but the Third Dynasty's founder desired immortality in death by means of a tomb worthy of a divine ruler. Imhotep's revolutionary design, stacking squared versions of mastabas on top of one another to create a pyramid, created the jewel





The Great Sphinx of Giza is believed to have been built in the time of Fourth Dynasty pharaoh Khafra

©Wik/ThomasW

in the king's rebuilt kingdom. A grand necropolis, a symbol of the enduring Egyptian reverence for death, surrounds it, and the finished article would go on to inspire pharaohs for generations to come.

The grandeur of the Step Pyramid (the Pyramid of Djoser) at Sakkara wasn't lost on those who followed in Djoser's footsteps. By the time that the Fourth Dynasty kings were ruling over Egypt (2613-2498 BCE), a new set of pyramids were forming. The Fourth Dynasty is considered the 'golden age' of the Old Kingdom, the very peak of prosperity. The economy was thriving thanks to a peaceful realm and open trade routes with its neighbouring nations. As with every peaceful period of ancient Egypt, a spree of construction swept the nation.

Khufu, the second pharaoh of the Fourth Dynasty, was the man who created a monument so grand that it would eventually be named one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World: the Great Pyramid of Giza. Built over a two-decade period, the 146.5-metre-high structure was a feat of engineering that put even Imhotep's Step Pyramid in Sakkara to shame. Giza would become the site of many more pyramids and temples, known as the Giza Necropolis. The Giza Pyramid became the pinnacle of pyramid design in Egypt and it

would remain the tallest man-made structure for a staggering 3,800 years. It served as a testament to the power of the pharaohs and the enduring potency of the many Egyptian gods.

The Fifth Dynasty of ancient Egypt (2498-2345 BCE) saw an evolution of theological practices across the entire nation, with certain cults growing in prominence (gods rose and fell in popularity, and usually those favoured by a particular dynasty or geographically important location were able to

survive obscurity). The Cult of Ra (god of the noon Sun) and the Cult of Osiris (god of the afterlife) rose significantly in popularity during this period of time.

The Egyptian economy was also booming, with the influx of goods like ebony, gold, myrrh and frankincense growing all the time. The Egyptians pushed their trading boundaries even further

with agreements with Lebanon and modern-day Somalia. In short, it was a time of enterprise without the fear of invasion or war.

This economic strength bled into the Sixth Dynasty (2345-2181 BCE), as did the growing popularity of the inscription of spells and incantations inside burial chambers and tombs. Known commonly as the Pyramid Texts, these inscriptions would form the basis of the *Book of the Dead*.

**"The Old Kingdom boasted a strong centralised administration from the capital of Memphis"**

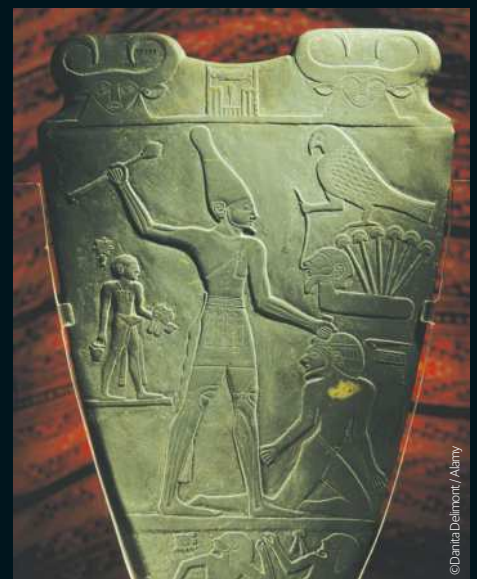
## THE FIRST PHARAOH

Who was the man who unified two distinctly different halves of the same realm and set the stage for the Old Kingdom period?

The Old Kingdom was the first true age of prosperity and progress for Egypt, but it would have been nothing without the two dynasties that came before it and the man who founded the pharaonic line to begin with. That man was Narmer and, much like many of the leaders and radicals who changed history in the post-Neolithic world, he is a man steeped in myth, legend and mystery. Nevertheless, his actions and decisions at the beginning of the First Dynasty set the precedent for the 29 others that would follow.

Narmer ruled sometime during the 31st century BCE and became the first man to unite the states of Upper and Lower Egypt. Of course, for an event that happened so far back in prehistory, most of the information we have comes from references found in tombs and the conclusions drawn by Egyptologists and historians, but there are some intriguing details we can take from them.

Seal impressions found in tombs at Abydos linked to the pharaohs Qa'a and Den (both of whom ruled, to the best of our knowledge, after Narmer during the First Dynasty) cite a list of ancient kings that name Narmer as the first. There have even been stone vessels (elaborate vases) found in the Step Pyramid tomb of Djoser that pay tribute to Narmer, perhaps expressing an intended connection with the founder and his way of life. Some historians argue that a ruler by the name of Menes was in fact the founder of founders, while others theorise Narmer and Menes were one and the same.



©Dania Delmont / Alamy

There's even an argument that Narmer is a pseudonym for the mysterious monarch King Scorpion, but no evidence currently exists to corroborate this claim



# THE MIDDLE KINGDOM

Once again divided and once again whole, ancient Egypt rose from its own ashes to become a military and cultural powerhouse

**F**or every period of greatness and monumental achievement in Ancient Egypt's history, there is a stretch of time where governments crumbled, territories divided and the nation fell into a dark lull. As the royal hold on the country fell apart towards the end of the Old Kingdom, Egypt was plunged into an era of uncertainty that is referred to as the First Intermediate Period.

To make matters worse, the power of the pharaoh was splintered when two rival dynasties began vying for power - the Tenth Dynasty (based in Herakleopolis, the principal city of Lower Egypt) and the 11th Dynasty (centralised in Thebes, Upper Egypt). This period of conflict and dissension lasted for 125 years, until the reign of Theban pharaoh Mentuhotep II.

Ascending to the Upper Egypt throne in 2055 BCE, Mentuhotep II watched as the Tenth Dynasty began to destabilise with in-fighting and regular riots. In his 14th year of regnal rule, the Theban king took full advantage of revolt and attacked Herakleopolis. By the time of his arrival, there was

barely a battle to be had, and the city, and the rest of the region as a result, were taken. He quelled what little resistance could be offered by the remaining rulers of the decaying Tenth Dynasty then set about reunifying the kingdom as one.

Such a task was not quick; it took a staggering 21 years to bring the Lower and Upper regions into line. He began by conducting a series of military campaigns to regain the territories lost during the dark time of the First Intermediate Period. He travelled south to the Second Cataract in Nubia, a region that had gained independence from its masters. Mentuhotep II brought the Nubians to heel before restoring Egyptian authority in the Sinai region. It was a ruthless expression of military power in an era when authority was a long forgotten force.

His consolidation of power in Egypt and efforts towards unifying the nation ushered in what we now know as the Middle Kingdom, and that effort was continued by his son and successor Mentuhotep III. His rule was brief by pharaonic standards (a mere 12 years) but he

further accelerated the unification, including an expedition to retake Punt (an old trading partner of Egypt). The throne then passed to Mentuhotep IV, whose reign remains something of a mystery. His name is often omitted from lists of kings found in tombs through the Middle and New Kingdoms, suggesting his rule was a short one and ended abruptly.

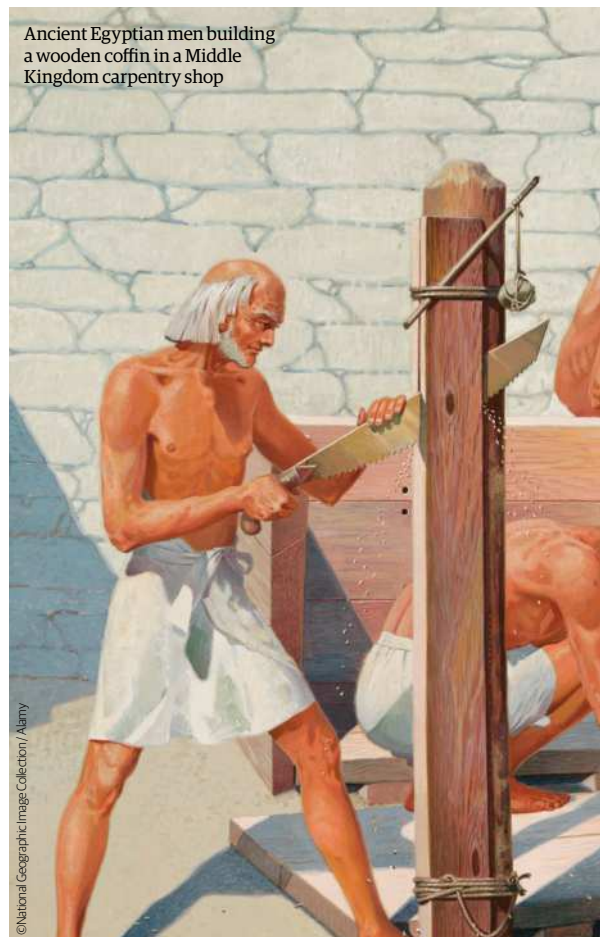
The Turin Papyrus (otherwise known as the Turin King List) is one such document; it describes the period following Mentuhotep III's death as "seven kingless years". Information regarding the 'missing king' remains scarce, but some details suggest a coup may have taken place. Records found at Wadi Hammamat, then a large mining region, attest to his reign and to expeditions to quarry stone for monuments. The records name a vizier, Amenemhat, as its commander. Whether or not this is the same Amenemhat that would eventually assume the throne, we cannot know for sure. However, it certainly seems likely.

So began the next dynasty, with Amenemhat I at its head. He began by moving the capital

Rock tombs of Beni Hasan, an ancient Egyptian burial site primarily used during the Middle Kingdom



Ancient Egyptian men building a wooden coffin in a Middle Kingdom carpentry shop





back to Memphis (the capital during the Old Kingdom), as well as forming a standing army - an asset his successors would maintain for the rest of the dynasty. The new king began fortifying the country's borders, especially those between Egypt and Asia, where he erected the Walls of the Ruler in the East Delta. In fact, Amenemhat I rebuilt or built new fortifications all around Egypt, transforming the ancient nation's military strategy from expansion to one of simple territorial defence.

Amenemhat I would eventually begin a co-regency with his son, Senusret, before the elder king was assassinated - supposedly by his own guards. His successor, now Senusret I, began

a more expansive series of military campaigns before eventually entering a co-regency with his own son, Amenemhat II. His son enjoyed a relatively peaceful reign of his kingdom and eventually chose a traditional joint rule with his successor, Senusret II. The new pharaoh built good relations with his nomarchs and focused mainly on the maintenance of the realm, building

a pyramid at el-Lahun as well as attempting to convert the Faiyum oasis into workable farmland.

Under the sole rule of his successor Senusret III, the Middle Kingdom enjoyed the peak of its power and influence. The new warrior king was unlike anything the era had ever seen before - he represented a mind-set from a long forgotten era, an aggressive hunger to expand the kingdom and conquer new lands. He moved a huge army north

of the kingdom and attacked the Nubians relentlessly, punishing them into surrender before finally claiming considerable Nubian territories.

His successor, Amenemhat III, is famed for his radical approach to construction. He took advantage of

the country's limestone and sandstone quarries like never before, beginning a huge programme of building that spread across the entire kingdom. Amenemhat's son, Amenemhat IV, has a poorly recorded rule but his successor, Sobekneferu, became the first recorded female Egyptian ruler in the country's history, although her reign lasted only four years.

**"During the Middle Kingdom, the elevated flood levels of the Nile boosted agriculture and buoyed the economy"**

The Pyramid of Amenemhat I began construction in Thebes. It is not known why it was relocated, along with the capital, to Lisht

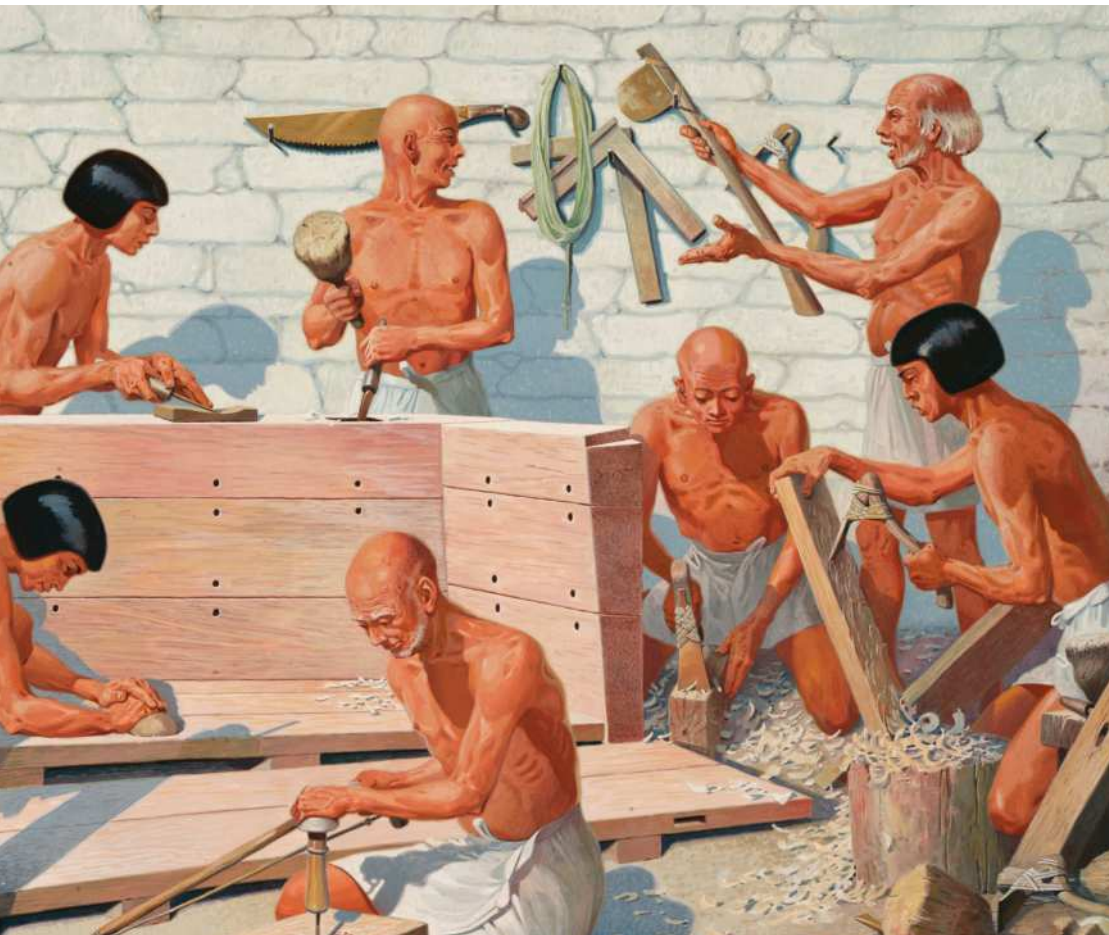


## THE FEUDAL GOVERNMENTS OF THE MIDDLE KINGDOM

In the Old Kingdom before it and the New Kingdom that followed, the pharaoh's rule was absolute. Priests, nobles and even the queen herself could act, with consent, on the king's behalf, but for the most part, the pharaoh answered to no one but the gods. However, that definitive rule came under threat when the Old Kingdom crumbled and splintered into two separate realms. With two dynasties now vying for power, the normal authoritative structure of the kingdom was in ruins.

Prior to the rise of the pharaohs, the entire country was divided into small administrative colonies known as nomes. Each nome had an appointed leader, or nomarch, and it was these independent city-states that the first pharaoh had to unite in order to establish Egypt as a single nation.

Even after unification, the nomarchs - 20 of whom were based in Lower Egypt and 22 in Upper Egypt - remained. However, they existed more as regional officials who would report directly to the royal court. As the country entered the First Intermediate Period, these nomes began to assume autonomy once again. By the time of reunification, new sole pharaoh Amenemhat I found these states unwilling to bend the knee entirely. The position of nomarch was considered hereditary (rather than being subject to the king's discretion), an issue made all the worse by marriages that created powerful alliances between multiple nomes. In order to maintain peace in the kingdom, Amenemhat was forced to agree to an alliance of sorts, creating a bizarre feudal system that lasted until the reign of Senusret III.







## THE NEW KINGDOM

The last great age of ancient Egypt was its grandest yet - an era of economic enterprise, domestic beautification and military expansion

**L**asting from the 16th to 11th century BCE, the New Kingdom saw ancient Egypt transformed. Its kings and queens both looked ahead at the promising future of the realm and back in the hope of emulating the monarchs of the past. The empire was expanded by the swords of warrior kings, while the realm itself was rebuilt from the ground up by a new economic prosperity. This was ancient Egypt at its peak, as reflected in the resultant creative boom.

The New Kingdom was preceded by another fracture known as the Second Intermediate Period. Towards the start of the 16th century BCE, a small warrior tribe known as the Hyksos had begun settling in the fertile land of the Delta (a group of rivers and tributaries that led into the Mediterranean Sea). By the time the pharaoh in

Thebes realised what was happening, it was too late. The Hyksos were fearsome warriors who used advanced weaponry - mainly cavalry, chariots and powerful compound bows - and who were comfortably settled. The 15th Dynasty was established and lasted for more than 150 years, but the Hyksos presence divided Egypt in two, with the invaders controlling Lower Egypt while the Thebans ruled Upper Egypt. Kings made many efforts to defeat the Hyksos, but the tribesmen were seasoned warriors and weren't so easily deterred.

It wasn't until the time of Ahmose I, the first pharaoh of the 17th Dynasty, that everything changed. Having watched his family fail to banish the Hyksos, Ahmose I raised a huge army and met the Hyksos with unrelenting

**“Mortuary beliefs developed during this era, leading to an influx of talismans and amulets for protection in the afterlife”**





force. Over many years he pummelled the borders, slowly driving the Hyksos back. Eventually, the Theban pharaoh drove the occupying forces from his homeland and set about restoring Egypt to its former glory.

With Egypt unified, the 17th Dynasty's founder began an expansive series of military campaigns that added new territories to the realm while regaining lands lost in the Second Intermediate Period. These conquests brought new wealth into the economy - it re-energised the construction of temples and monuments and enabled Ahmose I to rebuild the decorated nation of old.

Ahmose I's desire to restore Egypt to its former greatness would be reflected in the actions of the kings and queens who followed. Amenhotep III rebuilt monuments, tombs and statues on a scale never seen before, solidifying the bubbling new culture of arts and expression.

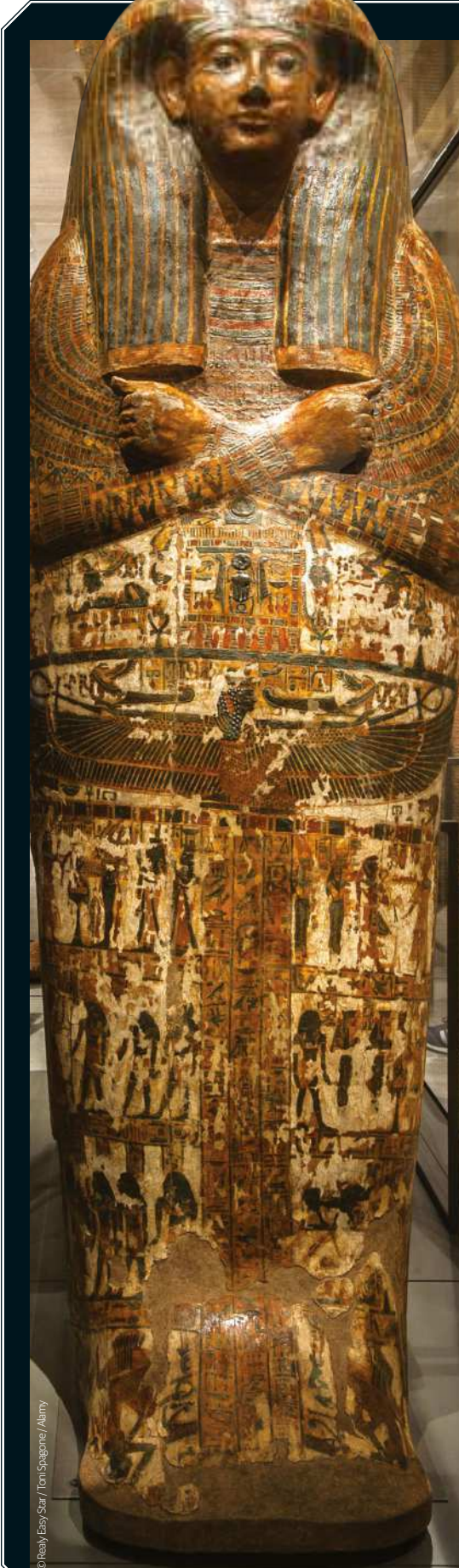
Queen Hatshepsut was the first woman to take the title of pharaoh, and she helped nurture the country's economy, including expeditions to Punt and other trading posts. Thutmose III created one of the most impressive armies ever assembled by a pharaoh and used it to expand Egypt's borders with conquest after conquest. The 18th Dynasty was a time of achievement on multiple fronts, but like any age of success, there was also a catch.

That blip came in the form of Amenhotep IV, also known as Akhenaten. A religious zealot who despised the power of the Church of Amun (the patron god of the Theban kings), Akhenaten did not believe in the polytheistic practices that had defined Egyptian theology since the country's earliest times. He outlawed the worship of any god other than his chosen deity, Aten, and forced the country into massive religious upheaval.

The Amarna Period, as it would come to be known, only lasted 16 years, but the damage was already done. The upheaval was so universally despised that Akhenaten was branded the 'Heretic Pharaoh', even by his own son and future pharaoh Tutankhamun. His legacy was summarily expunged from many future histories and a course was set to bring Egypt back to its former glory.

The dynasty that followed pushed Egypt's prosperity to new heights. The most notable pharaoh of the period, Ramesses II, took the great armies formed by Thutmose III and weaved a military campaign that moulded Egypt into its most powerful form. He sired a considerable number of children (most of whom he outlived) and built a huge tomb and necropolis in the Valley of the Kings.

Like the 19th Dynasty, the 20th was also defined by the legacy of one man: Ramesses III. However, while Ramesses II would strengthen his nation, his descendent would ultimately weaken it by draining the treasury with unsuccessful military campaigns. It was his mismanagement that eventually set about the slow decline of the New Kingdom and the native pharaonic line as a whole.



## WHAT HAPPENED NEXT?

Following the end of the New Kingdom and its final golden age, what was next for this ancient civilisation?

While the period we have come to know as ancient Egypt officially ended with the death of Cleopatra VII and its addition to the Roman Empire in 30 BCE, its true demise could actually be attributed to the death of Ramesses XI. The span of time that followed, the Third Intermediate Period, saw the power of the pharaohs start to deteriorate as political in-fighting took hold.

The period lasted about 350 years and was split into three stages: the first saw the rule of the country divided between the 21st Dynasty (which controlled Lower Egypt) and the High Priests of Amun at Thebes (which ruled most of Middle and Upper Egypt). The two states existed in relatively peaceful harmony. The second period saw the country reunited thanks to the rise of the 22nd Dynasty and new king Shoshenq I - the Libyan monarchy came to power in about 945 BCE, expanding out from the East Delta to control the entire nation. Once the country's bitter enemy, the Libyans now ruled Egypt as native Egyptians. The country began to destabilise once again under the rule of the 22nd Dynasty in 850 BCE, and by 818 BCE, a rival 23rd Dynasty had risen, which then caused the nation to fragment into warring states.

The country would eventually fall to a Nubian invasion, lasting 25 years. This marked a trend for the coming centuries as Egypt's grand native history was buried by an Assyrian, Persian and eventual Greek invasion during the subsequent Late Period. In short, the nation had fragmented so far from the stable centralised structure of the three kingdom eras that it ultimately benefited from the stability outside rule brought with it.





# Inside the Nile 'Mother of all men'

Tour the iconic waterway that was the lifeblood of one of the world's most powerful ancient civilisations



## Life on the banks

The river was absolutely vital to the Egyptian economy, although its huge floods affected the settlements on its banks.

## Canoes

There were different types, made from reeds or papyrus. They served as a means of exchange between traders and consumers.

## Power

In the canoes, passengers either sat rowing or remained on foot, pushing with long poles.

## Sails

These were square-shaped, made from papyrus fibre and located on the bridge.

## Commercial vessels

They travelled from port to port with soldiers and scribes on board. They sometimes measured over 40m (131ft) in length, with a curved hull and sail.

## BACKBONE

Over the centuries, the Egyptian civilisation gradually settled along the banks of the final 1,300 kilometres (808 miles) of the Nile. Farms dominated the landscape around its banks, and its waters were the primary means of communication. For daily tasks, small canoes were used; but for trade or transporting passengers, strong sail boats were employed.



**I**t's impossible to overestimate the importance of the Nile to the Ancient Egyptians. The 7,507-kilometre (4,665-mile) river literally brought life to an arid desert wasteland. Its fertile valleys provided protection from the harsh elements, its waters teemed with fish and fowl, and the Nile's seasonal floods deposited mineral-rich silt from the highlands to feed Egyptian soil, allowing for unprecedented agricultural abundance.

This life-giving river, known as Hapi in the age of Ramesses, was rightfully worshipped as a god. It was the chief mode of transporting shipments of grain, gold and weaponry across the length of the empire. Ramesses even placed his mortuary temple, the Ramesseum, along the banks of the upper Nile in Thebes. It doubled as a reserve bank and could hold 350 boatloads of grain, ready for shipment in the event of a poor harvest.

The pharaohs relied on astronomer priests to read the stars in order to gauge the timings of seasonal floods, which were essential for agriculture. Ramesses used marker stones in the upper Nile to carefully record river levels; he would then send word to the Delta cities when the waters began to swell. This was a cause for celebration and people sang praises to the gods during epic festivals that marked the start of the floods.

## Ploughs

The often-flooded, soft soil was ploughed using draught animals.

## Canals

These distributed the water during swells of the Nile to fertilise the fields.

## Cropland

Wheat and barley were produced in the irrigated fields and transported on a small and large scale.

## Funerary monuments

The sophisticated pyramid construction required the transportation of stone over long distances.

## Sculls

A pair of identical oars at the stern acted as a rudder.

## Hunting and fishing

Practised using canoes, with nets for fish and spears for aquatic birds.

## Lattice masts

Located at the bow and the stern to steer the vessel.

## Shell

Made from planks of cedar wood.

## Strake

The row of planks that covered the vessel's shell.

## HUB OF TRANSPORTATION

The River Nile was the link between the various Egyptian cities, from the Second Cataracts of Lower Nubia to the Mediterranean Sea. A whole host of vessels travelled the river, transporting people and goods from one side of the empire to the other.



# Life on the banks of the Nile

As one of the best documented ancient societies the world has ever known, daily life in Ancient Egypt is remarkably well understood

**H**uman culture has been a part of the Nile Valley as far back in time as 6000 BCE. That's long before the time period commonly thought to have seen the dawn of the Ancient Egyptian civilisation at about 3000 BCE. At this time, the various communities of the Nile Valley were brought together by King Narmer. The society that emerged would continue to develop for several millennia, all the way up until 30 BCE, when Egypt was in the throes of being colonised by the powerful Roman Empire.

Like so many cultures around the world, the beginning of human settlement is typically profoundly dominated by proximity to a river. The River Nile, one of the most famous rivers in the world, became the lifeblood of the people of Ancient Egypt, who built their lives around its ebbs and flows, monitoring them in detail. The Nile irrigated the land for arable farming, offered plentiful fishing and was equally plentiful in supplying the material needed for papyrus, in the form of the reeds that grew in the

river. The Nile also made travel up and down Egypt very manageable, as well as facilitating access toward sub-Saharan Africa and north into the Mediterranean for trade. The nation's wealth and prosperity rested on the river's shoulders.

Our understanding of daily life in Ancient Egypt has been shaped so very powerfully by the discoveries made by

archaeologists since the early 19th century. Such evidence has granted us a huge degree of understanding of a culture that's immensely remote from our own, and yet shows parallels with how we live today.

Key to Egyptian sensibility was an emphasis on order as a means of negating chaos, an ethos established through centuries of tradition and evidently not keenly challenged

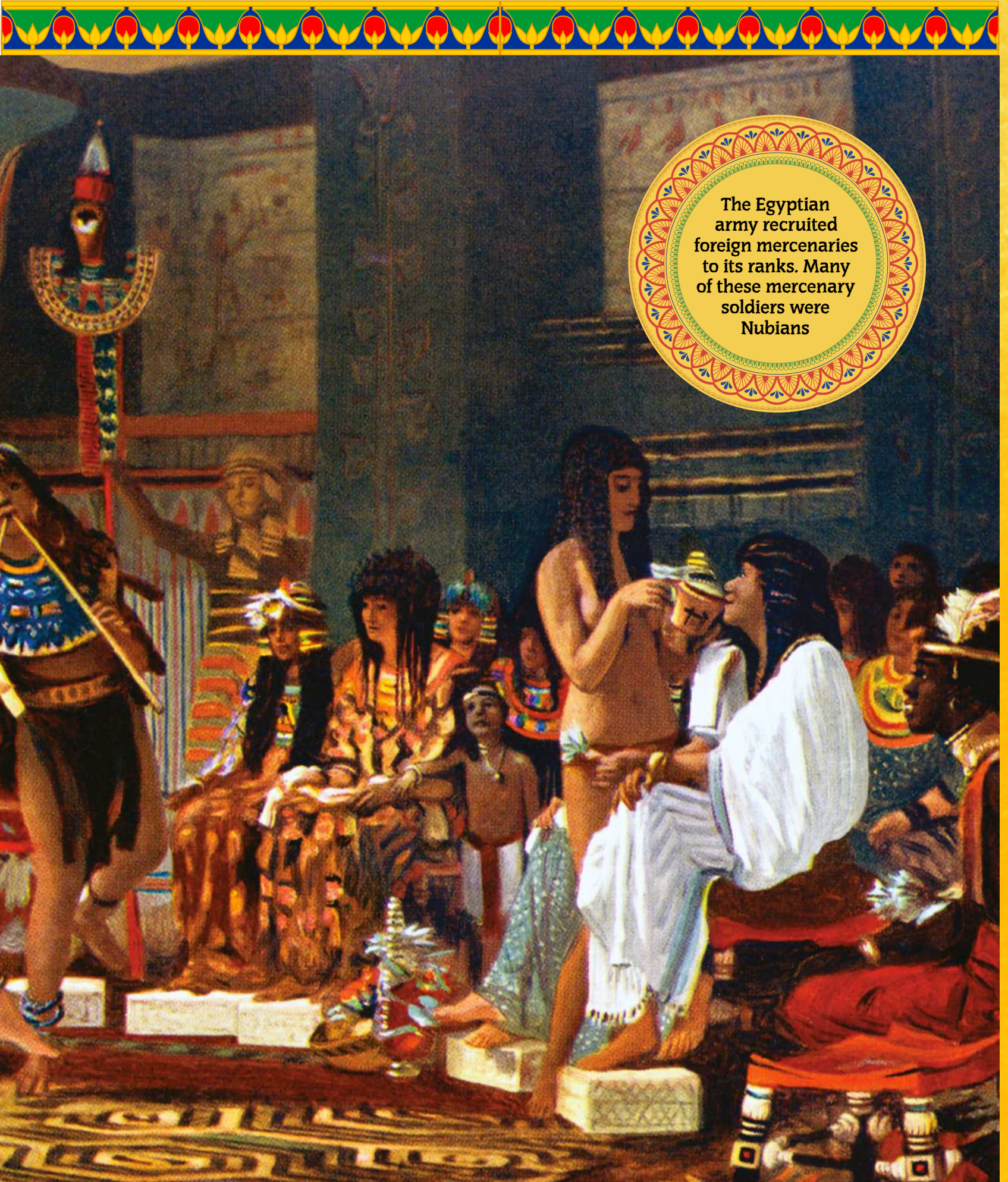
or subverted. For the highly developed religious culture of Ancient Egypt, this concept of harmony was embodied by the figure of the goddess Ma'at. Throughout its history, daily life in Ancient Egypt was informed and influenced by this strong relationship with religious practise.

**For all of its commitment to order, Ancient Egypt experienced its own 'dark ages', which was characterised by conflict**





The Egyptian  
army recruited  
foreign mercenaries  
to its ranks. Many  
of these mercenary  
soldiers were  
Nubians





## ESTABLISHING SOCIAL ORDER

Ancient Egypt evolved a formalised class structure, which was the foundation of social order. A rigid social hierarchy denied what we would now call upward social mobility, which was not a common experience.

History records that individuals in society could be defined by seven classes. At the top of the pyramid was the pharaoh, who was considered divine, and below him were the further seven levels of society: the priests and officials, and then below them the warrior class. Below the warriors were scribes, and below them merchants then craftsmen. Below craftsmen were farmers and the boatmen that traversed the River Nile and its tributaries. Critically, we must recognise that the culture also comprised slaves (typically former prisoners of war), as well as marginalised individuals and groups existing on the fringes of the mainstream.

The most acute expression of the social order was manifest in the money earned by the different professions. Practitioners of medicine were among the best paid. In contrast, craftsmen earned meagre sums. Taxation is a central feature of nation states with a developed infrastructure, and Egypt was no exception, with administrative emphasis crucial to its smooth running. The pharaoh served as head of state and appointed the great treasurer. Evading tax payment incurred severe punishment. The nation's clearly defined social hierarchy was underpinned by long-standing laws and administrative structures. One of the binding laws was the law of Tehut. Tehut was the god of wisdom, and the culture's broader sensibility adhered to a mood of integrity and personal responsibility.

**Pharaoh**

**Government officials**

**Soldiers**

**Scribes**

**Merchants**

**Craftsmen**

**Peasants**

**Slaves**

# Society & social structure

**I**n his immense scholarly work *The Histories*, the Greek scholar Herodotus wrote a book exclusively about Egypt set in the years between 664 BCE and 525 BCE. This material has been valuable to our modern-day understanding of life in everyday Egypt. Herodotus writes that "concerning Egypt itself I shall extend my remarks to a great length, because there is no country that possesses so many wonders, nor any that has such a number of work which defy description..." Clearly, Herodotus captures something of the enduring fascination with Ancient Egypt in this excerpts from his work.

Interestingly, our insights and knowledge about Ancient Egypt have been informed by the written reports of Greek and Roman scholars who travelled to Egypt between the fifth century and the second century BCE. Key writers include Hecateus of Mitetus in 500 BCE. Hecateus's work *Periodos Ges* (alternative title, *Periegesis*, meaning "Tour of the World") offers useful insights into what daily life was like. He writes that Egypt is "the gift of the Nile" in a phrase that ably articulates the fascination with Egypt that has endured for so many over the subsequent centuries.

In the artwork of Ancient Egypt, the human figures who feature largest in any given image on a monument would have had the most social capital and standing. The lower a person's position in the social order, the smaller their image in public art. Suffice it to say, Ancient Egyptian society and its structure adhered to a very strict sense of long-established social hierarchy.

In the Third Dynasty, the pharaoh Djoser unified the country and established a very clear social order based around the capital at Memphis in northern Egypt, just south of the fanlike shape of the Nile delta, which was comprised of tributaries that ran out to the Mediterranean.

Under Djoser's reign, the Old Kingdom era flourished, and it was during this period that kings were regarded as gods on earth and pyramids were raised in their honour. However, residing above all people were the many multiple deities, such as Ra, Osiris and Isis.

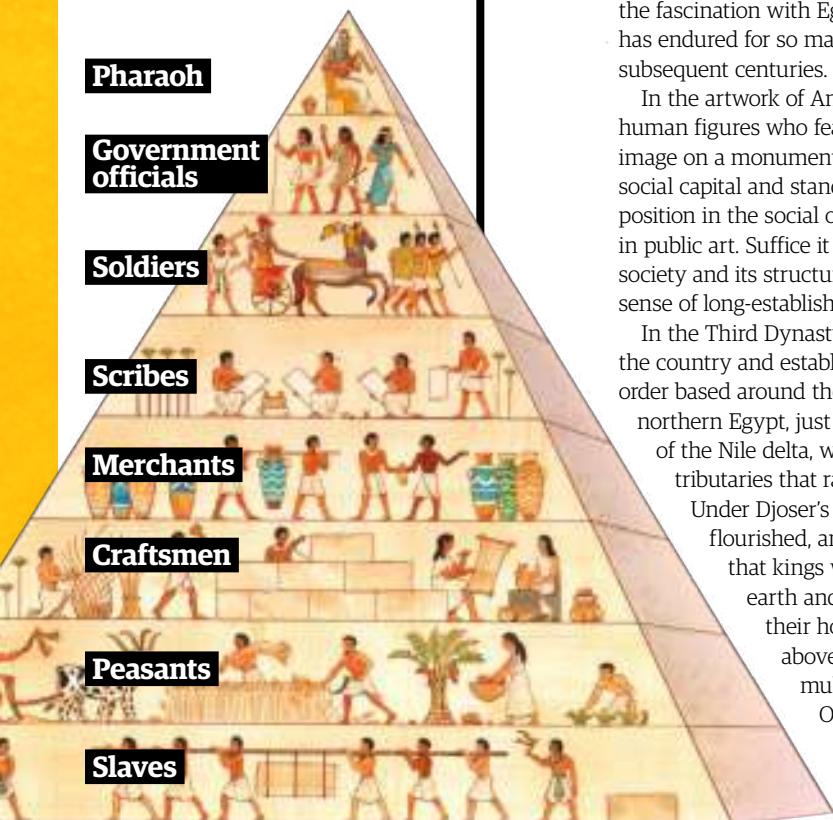
In terms of society and social structure of Ancient

**Tombs from the Middle Kingdom period would include models depicting features of daily life, such as farm scenes**

Egypt, we have to think about a culture that spanned 3,000 years, reaching from the Predynastic period through to the time of

Ptolemy. Across the three millennia of this period, we can identify five key elements that shape our understanding of the society: kinship (connection between blood relatives and through marriage), location (connection between people born in the same place or who live in the same place), gender (connection between people of the same sex and sexual orientation), age (connection between people of the same age), and social class (connection between people born into the same social standing).

At the very highest rung of the social ladder, the pharaoh was regarded as a living god, in particular a manifestation of the earthly embodiment of Horus, the god of order, who was the son of the goddess Isis. The pharaoh was responsible for maintaining order and ensuring that the gods were kept happy with human endeavour. It's also unsurprising that the pharaoh's interests and responsibilities included military campaigns. The women at the centre of the king's life were also accorded great status. One of the most famous royal marriages was that of Akhenaten







Ancient Egyptian warriors in traditional dress

## “The women at the centre of the king's life were also accorded great status”

and Nefertiti. In cartouches dated to the Second Intermediate Period, the name of a king's wife would be represented. A number of Old and Middle Kingdom wives of kings were buried in a pyramid.

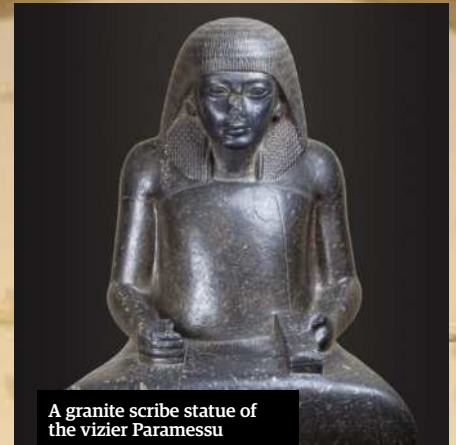
Below the king on the social pyramid was the ruling elite, comprised of nobles and priests. There may have been family connections between the monarchy and the elite strata, although not in every case. A famous exception to this rule was Imhotep; an elite scribe educated in mathematics, writing, medicine and architecture; he rose through the ranks to become an adviser to Djoser.

The children of a high-level government official in Ancient Egypt could expect a rather different kind of upbringing and life in general, compared to the child of any other social order beneath them on the social hierarchy. Typically, Egyptian writing was the product of the elite class and was indicative of their life experiences. Below the elite were the craftsmen and physicians of Egyptian society - these comprised what we would today consider the middle class.

At the other end of the scale, manual labour was seen as less worthy of respect than work that

involved writing or arithmetic. At the lowest rung on the social order were farmers - the class that comprised most people in Ancient Egypt. Their lives are rarely recorded in extant Egyptian texts. However, we have been able to develop a sense of their lives through archaeological work on funerary objects. Weaving throughout society were slaves, who occupied the lowest of the social classes yet played an integral part in the life of the upper classes. It seems the idea of freedom, as we might understand it today, was not embraced.

Yet, through surviving writings and the information available on its numerous public buildings, monuments and art, we see a culture that saw women enjoy a certain degree of social mobility, albeit within the parameters of an overriding patriarchy. Perhaps it is surprising, then, that the wife of a pharaoh would have often been directly involved in military matters and helping influence important policies. Given the country's emphasis on order in its multifarious contexts, Egyptian males' 'openness' to elite women's freedom runs counter to the stress so clearly placed on marriage and motherhood.



A granite scribe statue of the vizier Paramessu

## DAY IN THE LIFE OF A VIZIER

A vizier's day was replete with administrative tasks and a lot of people management

The importance of public administration was of great emphasis in this time. Overseeing these administrative systems were viziers, provincial governors and senior officials, which were positions occupied by the nobility.

### 07:00 am

Get myself dressed in that splendid new linen robe. Breakfast of fruit and bread and then see that son heads off to school for scribal study. Meeting with pharaoh first thing to update him on new public building programme. Don't forget writing instruments and papyrus to make shorthand notes with.

### 09:00 am

Work from office in Thebes attending to budget for current public works building programme. Meet with provincial governor to discuss administering records for the forthcoming harvest. A junior scribe sits in on the meeting to record notes for the governor. He's not a fan of writing at all.

### 13:00 pm

Meet with the chief of police for a monthly update on arrests and other related issues. The chief explains that his men need stronger legal powers as the border country to the west has become highly susceptible to criminal activity. Must be sensitive to those more marginalised groups who aren't endeavouring to exploit our city's opportunities.

### 17:00 pm

Write up notes of the day's meetings and then take a meeting with the Medjay bowmen's chief archer. We discuss required new resources and information about ongoing threats to the safety of the public. I consult a legal document to remind the chief archer of the protocol when making an arrest.

### 18:00 pm

Unexpected call out to the riverside to supervise arrival of a delegation of priests from Memphis for a festival. Catch up with my daughters. Spend the evening with my wife and my brother. Delighted by his rendition of the New Kingdom poem The Flower Song - a real favourite of ours.



# Home life

**T**hrough the trail of archaeological excavations, we have come to gain an insight into some class-based variations in the rhythms and patterns of life in an Ancient Egyptian home.

An ordinary working Egyptian man, such as a farmer, would have had no slaves at the home to help him prepare for the day ahead. His wife would have been responsible for preparing the children for the day. A bench would suffice as a place to eat at and the family would sit on reed mats. When the farmer went out to work on his land, his wife would typically remain at home and tend to domestic work, such as preparing food.

A farmer would have been required to take some of his harvest to the temple as payment for using the temple land. Evening meals for the family were modest. Bread and fruit would have been staples of the everyman's daily diet, and beer was a commonly consumed drink.

In contrast with the ordinary labourer's home, the homes of the elite were well appointed. Key to

the day-to-day running of the household were the slaves, who would assist an elite man in washing and shaving for the day ahead. Husband and wife would boast a servant each to assist their morning preparations, in addition to servants who would get the children ready for the day ahead. A nobleman would also employ a man to supervise his land in terms of arable and pastoral work.

The homes of Egyptians were constructed from a combination of mud and papyrus, the climate understandably informing the kind of building materials used. However, with the Nile flooding annually, materials shifted to bricks made from clay and mud. Among so many other things that we can thank the Egyptians for, the word 'adobe', which stems from the Egyptian word *dbē*, meaning 'mudbrick' can be attributed to them.

Contrasting with the very modest conditions of most Egyptian homes, those of the elite might have as many as 30 rooms, as well as a garden with space enough for many guests. The flat roof of an Egyptian house meant that it could be used as

another living space, which was especially handy for the poorest of society. They lived in single-room houses that were furnished primarily with mats and perhaps a single stool. To keep the sunlight and heat at bay, windows would be covered with reed mats. There was also no running water, so it would have been sourced from a local well.

For all of its seeming remoteness from our own lives, the daily lives of a typical family in Ancient Egypt revolved around an extended family, particularly among the rural communities. Away from these rural communities, in a city like Memphis or Thebes, houses were in close proximity to each other. Given the commonality of shopkeeping, the ground floor of a property was often used for business, while home life was conducted upstairs.

## "Key to the day-to-day running of the household were the slaves"

### Strong walls

Like many houses of the Ancient world, the walls were made of mud - 'dbē' - bricks. Mud was dried under the sun in wooden moulds and the bricks were then covered in bitumen to make them waterproof.

### Ventilation

Ancient Egyptian houses had vents on the roofs and high windows to allow cool air to circulate, while preventing direct exposure to the elements and discouraging intruders.

### Front door

This would have been made out of thick wood with a system of wooden safety locks.

### Entrance hall

The first room on entering the house would have been elaborately decorated, with a shrine to honour the god Bes, who was the protector of the family.



## ENTERTAINING EGYPT

Key to developing a culture's sense of identity is not just work and big-picture value systems; how the society entertains itself is also important to consider. Board games were hugely popular in Ancient Egypt, notably one game called Senet – an especially well-known and simple game that people played for more than 2,000 years. Senet simply involved throwing sticks down in order to determine how far a player's game piece would advance along a board.

For the pharaohs, hunting was the king's sport just as it once was in Britain. Then there was the Nile itself, which was the perfect venue for swimming and sailing.

As with most, if not all, cultures, music was a key part of the creative expression in the daily life of Egyptian people. The harp and lyre were widely used instruments, and we can imagine how perhaps their love of poetry related well to their musical inclinations. Archaeologists have excavated a collection of such

poems in a village named Deir el-Medina. The texts date back to the period of the New Kingdom.

Children in Ancient Egypt would typically play with small models of animals, reflecting the rurally centred lives that most Egyptians shared. It doesn't seem too wildly speculative to suggest that, as in our own culture, the forms of entertainment embraced by the people mirror somewhat the class distinctions that influenced and shaped their lives.

### Roof

People often slept and worked on the roof. They also dried and salted meat and fish up here.

### Decoration

Walls would have been white washed and some were decorated with geometric patterns or pictures.

### Kitchen

Kitchens were well equipped, with designated areas for cutlery, utensils and jars. They also had clay ovens, in which they baked bread and other foods.

### Bedroom

The Ancient Egyptians slept on mats that could be rolled out, or on beds made of threaded hemp with a wooden headrest and a mattress filled with wool or straw.

### Basement

This area would have been used to store food and valuables, and was often accessible via a trap door.

### Living room

The Egyptians have been credited with inventing the living room – a central room where members of the family ate and socialised. These would have had stools, tables and ceramic vases, with the best pieces of furniture made from carved and painted wood.



## LESSONS IN EDUCATING EGYPT

### Mathematics

In this lesson, scribal students undertake training in accountancy protocol, record keeping and the requirements for maintaining budgets on architectural projects so as to understand income and outgoings. Don't forget to bring your scribe board and reed stem pen to make notes with.

### Architecture

In this lesson, scribal students will learn the rules of proportion and scale. We will also revise rules of geometry and physics in order to identify issues in organising the movement of building materials. Key to our work will be how to record information about issues with safety on site.

### Poetry

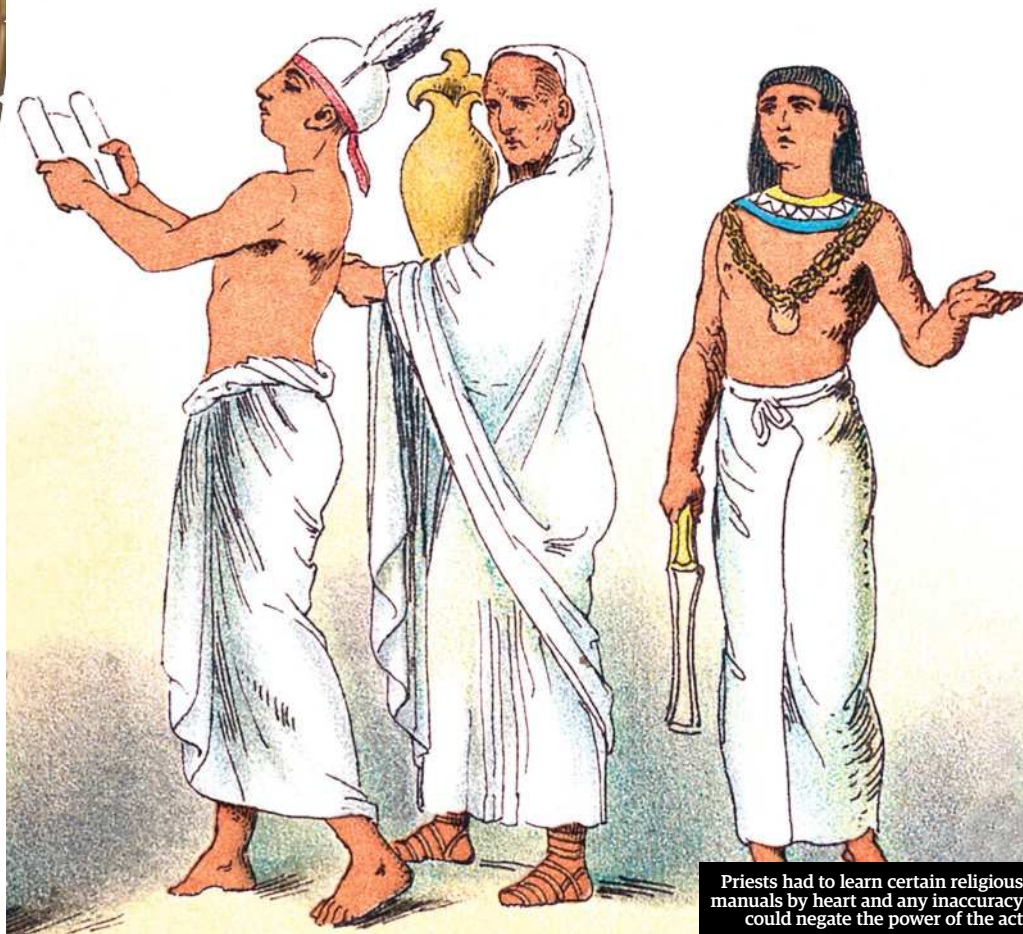
In this poetry class you will recite three poems handed down from our ancestors. In each of these poems, we can learn something of the wisdom of how to live the most full and orderly life. We will then concentrate on transcribing three new spells and three new hymns.

### Hieroglyphic practice

In this class we will focus attention on Demotic writing so that you can make notes quickly and then develop full documents. We will then revisit the storage of your papers in our archive of clay jars. You will be tested on how to locate an item in the archive.

### Social and moral instruction

Instruction will be given by a chantress as you learn several new hymns to share with your friends, families and the wider community. You will then transcribe her instructions. In your work as successful scribes you will be required to transcribe meetings on a daily basis.



## Education

**C**ertainly, education in Ancient Egypt was regarded as a means of improving one's social standing, and formal schooling was a fundamental part of the lives of young people from the elite strata of society. However, we can also say that Ancient Egypt was a culture that recognised the more broadly enriching value of education as a way of deepening one's understanding of the world.

As we might typically expect to be the case, it was in the family unit where a child would learn and develop their value system. Boys had the opportunity to be trained in the work that interested them, but girls did not have this opportunity available to them. Education, then, would have extended to include imparting younger family members with a code of morality (with its emphasis on maintaining order at both individual and broader social levels) and training

for a particular kind of work, whether agricultural, craftwork, medicine or work as an administrator. Each kind of job carried with it a certain social standing. What we know about education in

Ancient Egypt is derived significantly from

The Books Of Instruction, which offer us a fascinating insight into the dynamics of social life and the expectation of right behaviour.

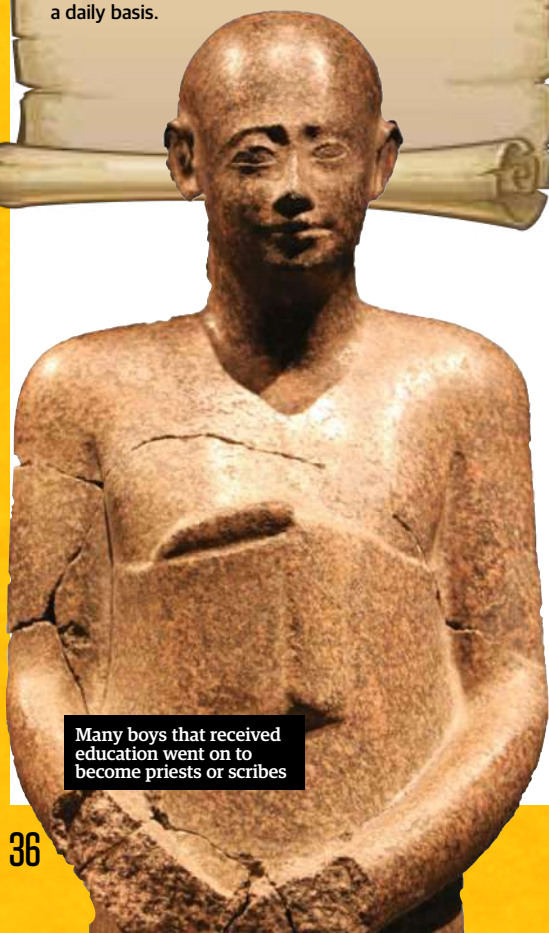
Historian J M Roberts writes that "the bureaucracy directed a country most of whose inhabitants were peasants," making the distinction between what we might call "the haves" and "the have nots".

Thousands of Egyptian boys would have been educated to work as scribes (in Egyptian the word *sesh* meant 'to draw'), and a school dedicated to this was located

at Thebes. However, we need to be mindful that this education was enjoyed by only a minority and that almost all Egyptians did not undertake a formal education. At this school, the students were educated in history and literature (tales, hymns

**Education in the home involved imparting children with a code of morality, focused on maintaining the social order**

Many boys that received education went on to become priests or scribes





## LEARNING HOW TO WORSHIP AND APPEASE THE GODS

Because the religious instruction received from the deities was accepted, preaching as a means of converting people who did not 'believe' was unnecessary in Ancient Egypt. Festivals were a major part of religious devotion and priests were central to organising these. At the priest's school, students would be instructed in ritual, magic spells and hymns and songs as offerings to the gods.

At the school, students would not refer to one single text but instead to a variety of texts that described rituals and religious belief systems. The student would also be educated in the routines and observances of a temple.

A priestly role that students might aspire to would be that of *kher keb*, which means the lector priest. This priest would read from a given text, this

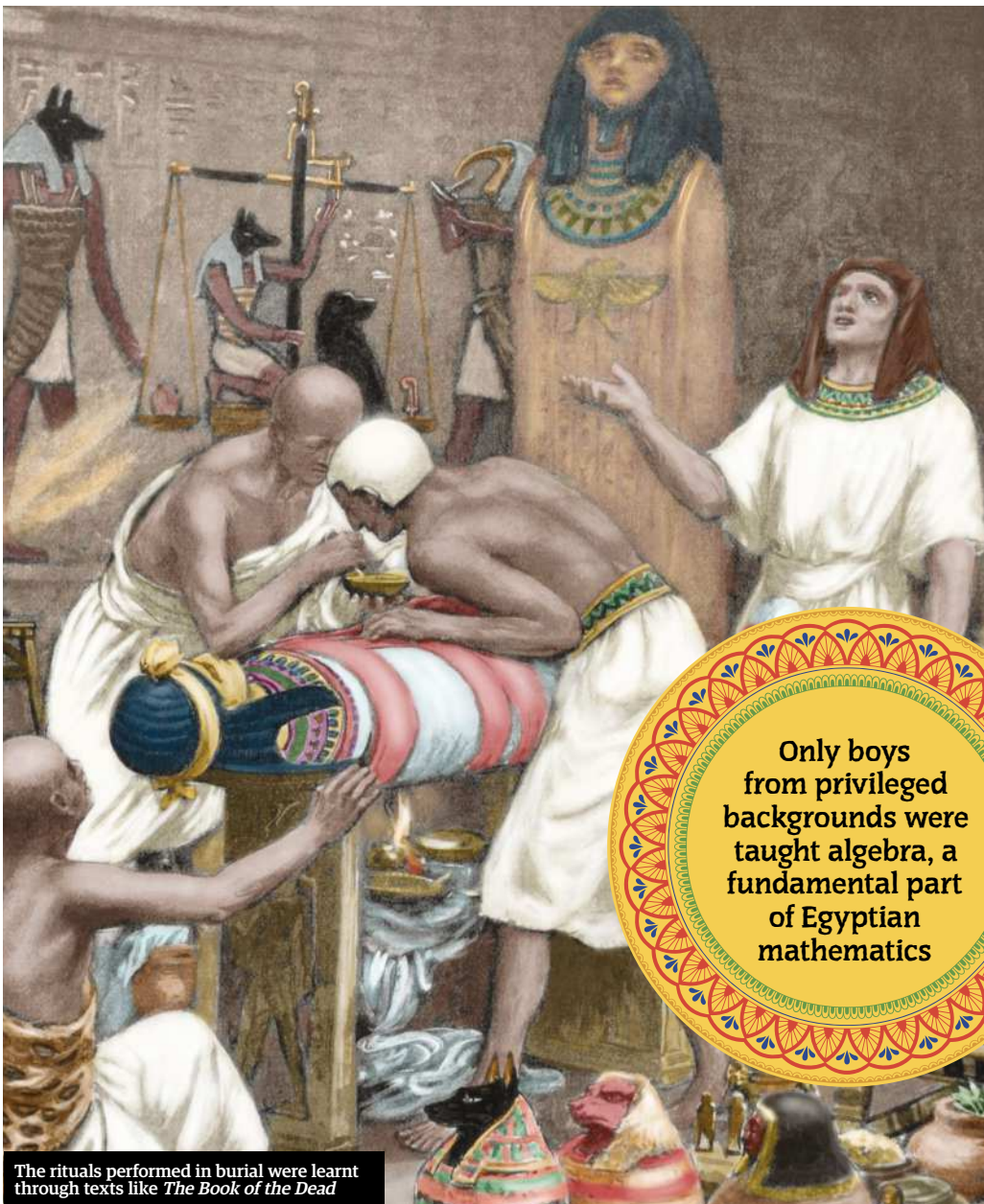
function bestowing on them particular authority. At the school, students would also be taught about how to conduct purification ceremonies. These would be undertaken by a priest in order to prepare themselves to enter the most sacred area of any temple, namely the sanctuary.

A student priest would be educated in the particulars of the many feast days and festivals such as First of the Month and the New Moon festivals. One of the most important festivals for a student priest to be taught about would be the Opet festival that was given at Karnak.

Alongside their more obvious, priestly duties and responsibilities, a student priest would be educated in a wide range of administrative processes that sat alongside their public religious functions.



This inscription shows the jackal-headed god Wepwawet and the earth-deity Geb



The rituals performed in burial were learnt through texts like *The Book of the Dead*

Only boys from privileged backgrounds were taught algebra, a fundamental part of Egyptian mathematics

and poems), as well as different kinds of writing. Students were also instructed in the disciplines of surveying, military endeavour, architecture and accountancy. Memphis was notable for being an administrative centre of Ancient Egypt; the emphasis on writing allowed the Egyptian state to become evermore cohesive and unified.

In a 1972 academic paper in the *Journal Of The American Oriental Society*, Volume 92, No. 2, Professor Ronald J Williams of the University of Toronto quotes from the Greek historian Diodorus Siculus (writing in the first century BCE). Siculus, who travelled in Egypt during 60-57 BCE, observed that the students had 'strong bodies, and with spirits capable of leadership and endurance because of their training in the finest habits.' Diodorus also explains that scribal students learned two kinds of writing, 'that which is called 'sacred' and that which is more widely used for instruction.' The type of sacred writing Diodorus identifies is exemplified by *The Book of the Dead*, which served as a key text for the people of Ancient Egypt and took the reader through the range of ceremonial beliefs.

Algebra would have been a very important part of the mathematics lessons taught to boys from the most privileged backgrounds. Egyptian numbers were developed using just seven ideograms: a single vertical stroke representing one; a shape resembling an 'n' but which was in fact a representation of a heel bone for the number ten; 100 was represented by a coil shape that represented a coil of rope. An ideogram of a lotus plant represented 1,000, and an ideogram of a human finger was used to represent a value of 10,000. An ideogram of a frog represented 100,000 and 1,000,000 was a value represented by a kneeling god. The young pupils had a lot to remember!

Fictional stories, poetry and hymns all comprised examples of how an education in literacy yielded important literary material.



## WORKING FOR A LIVING

Ancient Egyptian workplaces comprised of some jobs that you might like to try out as well as those that you definitely wouldn't

### Best jobs

#### Agriculture

##### Farm Owner

As the farm owner, you're very much your own boss and there's no need to commute to work. The big challenge for the farmer is dealing with the inundation: the season of floods that comes every year between June and September. During this time, farmers would do government work as a labourer on grand public building projects.



### Worst jobs

##### Labourer

A huge number of the population were labourers. They would work in the fields of farmers or as servants in the homes of society's nobles. Like the farmer, the labourer would be required to work on public building projects during the inundation. Labourers earned little money, with very little opportunity for social mobility.

#### Administration

##### Vizier

Living in a comfortable home and tended to by servants, a vizier enjoyed significant authority supervising the work of other bureaucrats. The vizier also advised the pharaoh on a wide range of matters. Typically, a vizier would live in proximity to one of the major administrative city centres, such as Alexandria, Thebes or Memphis.



##### Servant

A servant in the context of Ancient Egypt's bureaucratic system would have been required to help prepare the vizier for his day at work, attending to helping him get dressed and then preparing breakfast for him and then making sure he had all of his belongings to hand before he headed out to work in the city.

#### Military

##### Charioteer

A rather 'glamorous' soldiering role, or even an elite role, you could say. Charioteers used composite bows, which meant that their arrows could be fired over a large distance. The chariot was hugely important in giving the Egyptian army a particular advantage. Charioteers were rigorously trained in military tactics and combat skills.



##### Servant

Life at military forts would have been tough and potentially dangerous for everyone based there. The servants at a fort would have attended to the vast panoply of supporting tasks to maintain an efficient fort, which would have been populated by archers, slingers, axe and club men, doctors, scribes and priests. All of society in microcosm.

#### Courtly life

##### Pharaoh

The highest authority in the land, and with all of the luxuries and comforts of home that you could imagine. The pharaoh was attended to throughout his whole life, and was able to do as much as he wished to shape a more favourable public perception of him through the mediums of public art and grand monuments in the kingdom.



##### Sandal bearer

Following behind the pharaoh, carrying his sandals. If you look at the Narmer Palette, you can see a sandal bearer at work. While it seems like an awful job, in one way or another it wasn't, as it was highly regarded work. The pharaoh's sandals symbolised his highest status in the country and might also have been associated with cleanliness.

#### Religion

##### Priest

Highly regarded as a wise communicant with the deities, priests occupied a very special place in Ancient Egyptian culture. Becoming a priest involved an initiation ritual and taking vows. Temple priests were responsible for the smaller temples, while a high ranking priest advised the pharaoh directly and performed sacred rituals.



##### Mummifier

Given the emphasis that Ancient Egyptian culture placed on preparation for death, the tradition of mummifying corpses, a weeks-long process, was a very ordinary part of working life in the world of religious practice. The mummifier would remove the internal organs of the corpse and liquify the brain by putting a hook up the nose.

# Working life

Historian J M Roberts wrote that "Ancient Egypt has always been our greatest visible inheritance from antiquity." As such, the archaeology and scholarship that has subsequently developed around Ancient Egypt offers us a sense of both the big and small picture of the nation.

Social status, then, was connected with one's occupation: a relationship that echoes and anticipates what still holds true for so many in the 21st century around the world. When was the last time you went to a social gathering and weren't asked what work you do to make a living?

It's essential to make clear the point that agricultural working life was the broad base on which Egyptian society and culture was built. In the Early Dynastic Period and thereafter, farmers lived in small villages and cereal agriculture was the most important domestic product.

Key agricultural crops were emmer wheat and barley. In their development of technology and the agricultural industry, Egyptian farmers developed irrigation systems that expanded the amount of land that could be farmed beyond immediate proximity to the River Nile.

Another key agricultural product was wine, and it was not only grapes that were used to produce it: farmers also made wine from figs, dates and pomegranates. Common to all farming life were sheep and goats, and wealthier farmers would also own cattle and oxen that would be a source of food as well as used for ploughing.

Essential to the organisation of the country and its workers were the scribes. For a scribe, their routine work would include writing up data about taxes, creating and administering census lists and drawing up calculations for the varied, immense building projects across the country.

Egypt was indeed a country of grand designs. The tradition of a civil service is a long-standing feature of so many countries. Historian Dr Gae Callender has made the point that "the Middle Kingdom was a time when art, architecture and religion reached new heights but, above all, it was an age of confidence in writing, no doubt encouraged by the growth of the 'middle class' and the scribal sector of society."

Labour-intensive work on public buildings and monuments was a constant feature of working life for many people living in Ancient Egyptian society, and this would have been supervised by the scribes, whose education included sustained study of administrative processes and principles of architecture and maths.





A painting from the burial chamber of Sennedjem showing a farmer ploughing

In Ancient Egypt, winches, pulleys, blocks or tackle were not used in civil engineering projects. Instead, levers and sleds and the use of immense ramps of earth were the combinations of 'hardware' that allowed for immense pieces of stone to be moved and positioned. It might be fair to say that the Hollywood movie *The Ten Commandments* recreates this kind of activity quite faithfully.

Ancient Egypt, unlike its eastward neighbour of Mesopotamia, did not become so urbanised and, therefore, working life for most of the population was largely centred on agricultural work. Arguably, while slavery did have a key role in the hierarchy of Ancient Egypt, it was not as prevalent as can be found in other contemporary societies beyond that of Egyptian borders.

**“Labour-intensive work on public buildings and monuments was a constant feature of working life for many Ancient Egyptians”**



Critically, women, while having not been formally educated, worked at all levels of society, and shared almost all of the same legal entitlements as men, from performing the duties of a royal household right through to piloting boats on the Nile and working as market traders.

Crucially, women from the upper class served in the priesthood, often as chantresses, an extremely high-profile and resonant role in such a highly religious community.

Key to Egyptian working life was trade both within and beyond its borders. Debate continues about whether the trade benefited the working man or the pharaoh more. Because of the Nile leading so readily to the Mediterranean, Egypt could trade relatively easily with the Mediterranean countries.

## BORDER LAW AND ORDER

An Egyptian police force was not a consistently trained or administrated unit, but it did exist in the forms of what we could call policemen. Guards certainly protected particular people and places and maintained a patrol of a given place.

As time went on, the police force became more refined and the practices of its police captains became standardised. The police force was tied quite strongly to Egypt's military and, in its earliest iteration during the Old Kingdom period, a police presence was very much a community effort.

Similar to the modern day Neighbourhood Watch, if a community could afford it, they might hire guards to patrol and protect their suburb. The more organised and administrated police force in its earliest form was comprised of men of the Medjay tribe who were highly skilled archers and came from the neighbouring Nubia. So well regarded were the Medjay, that their tribal name became the generic name for the police during the New Kingdom period.

As the idea of a police force evolved, it did at times function as a paramilitary of sorts and the Medjay would be engaged to patrol Egypt's borders on foot and on horseback as cavalry. The nascent police force would also enforce tax collection among Egypt's citizens and might also function as messengers between government officials when they were needed.



# Gods of Ancient Egypt

The Ancient Egyptians are perhaps best known for their complex religion, whose hundreds of gods were worshipped in some of the most spectacular temples ever built

**A**s early as 17,000 BCE, carvings of wild cattle alongside strange hybrid creatures at the site of Qurta in southern Egypt suggest an early belief in the hidden forces of nature. With Egypt's earliest stone sculpture at about 7,000 years old believed to represent a cow, it is clear this was an animal that played an important role in the lives of the early Egyptians. So too did their desert environment, in which the dominant Sun was worshipped as a variety of gods, much like the River Nile, whose annual life-bringing floodwaters were likewise venerated as divine and holy.

As these aspects of the natural world gradually developed into individual gods, each region of Egypt also had their own local deities whose characters evolved through stories and myths. One of the key myths for the Ancient Egyptian people was the story of creation, when the primeval waters of chaos receded to reveal a mound of earth on which all life first appeared.

Yet with so many different deities throughout the Nile Valley, each region claimed that life had been created by their own local god. In Egypt's earliest capital, Memphis, their chief deity Ptah had emerged from the waters

to summon up all living things by simply speaking their names, while at the nearby city of Sais, creation was regarded as the handiwork of the goddess Neith. Meanwhile at Hermopolis, life had been sparked into being through the combined energies of eight gods, four male frogs and four female snakes, while in the far south at Aswan, the ram-headed god Khnum had created all life on his potter's wheel.

But the most important creation myth centred on Heliopolis, where the supreme deity was the Sun god Ra. Worshipped as 'the Mother and Father of All', the Sun produced twin children Tefnut, goddess of moisture, and Shu, god of air, who in turn produced the sky goddess Nut and the earth god Geb, parents of divine twin couples Isis and Osiris, Seth and Nephthys.

With Isis and her brother Osiris claimed as Egypt's first rulers, they were succeeded by their son Horus, then the 'Followers of Horus', demigods who preceded the first human rulers, each of whom was regarded as the gods' child.

Over the subsequent 3,500 years of pharaonic history (c. 3100 BCE-395), Egypt's pantheon of deities continued to expand as more gods were introduced and some merged together, creating a complex and varied pattern of religion.

**To the Egyptians, writing was sacred as it gave reliability, and enabled all knowledge of the world to be recorded**









# Meet the gods of Egypt

Almost 1,500 deities are known by name and many of them combine with each other and share characteristics. Here are some of the most important



## Ra

### God of the Sun

Ra was Egypt's most important Sun god, also known as Khepri when rising, Atum when setting and the Aten as the solar disc. As the main creator deity, Ra also produced twin gods Shu and Tefnut.



## Geb

### God of the Earth

As the grandson of Ra and the son of Shu and Tefnut, green-skinned Geb represented the Earth and was usually shown reclining, stretched out beneath his sister-wife Nut.



## Isis

### Goddess of motherhood and magic

The daughter of Geb and Nut, Isis was the perfect mother who eventually became Egypt's most important deity, 'more clever than a million gods' and 'more powerful than 1,000 soldiers'.



## Osiris

### God of resurrection and fertility

Isis's brother-husband Osiris was killed by his brother Seth, only to be resurrected by Isis to become Lord of the Underworld and the god of new life and fertility.



## Horus

### God of Kingship

When his father Osiris became Lord of the Underworld, Horus succeeded him as king on Earth, and became the god with whom every human pharaoh was then identified.



## Seth

### God of storms and chaos

Represented as a composite mythical creature, Seth was a turbulent god who killed his brother Osiris, only to be defeated by Osiris's son and avenger Horus, helped by Isis.



## Nephthys

### Goddess of protection

As fourth child of Geb and Nut, Nephthys was partnered with her brother Seth, but most often accompanied her sister Isis as twin protectors of the king and of the dead.





## THE ANIMAL CULTS OF ANCIENT EGYPT

The Egyptians greatly respected the natural world, particularly animals whose spirits were worshipped as divine. With Egypt's earliest known art representing animals alongside humans, various creatures were placed in human burials as early as c. 4000 BCE, and the relationship was a fundamental part of Egypt's evolving religion.

Gods could be portrayed entirely as an animal, or in human (anthropomorphic) form

with an animal's head, as imitated by masked priests. Many deities also had a sacred creature, which was worshipped in life then mummified at death.

The most important of these was the Apis Bull of Memphis. Believed to house the soul of the creator god Ptah when alive, it was then worshipped as the underworld god Osiris after its death when the next bull was selected to continue the cycle. Other sacred

bulls and cows were worshipped elsewhere in Egypt, with other animal cults including the sacred crocodiles of Sobek, representing the power of the king, and the sacred rams of the creator god Khnum. There were also the ibis and baboons representing the god Thoth, and the cats sacred to the feline deity Bastet. Such creatures were mummified in their millions as physical manifestations of the divine and symbols of Egypt's devotion to its creatures.



### Ptah

**God of creation and craftsmen**

Ptah was a creator god and patron of craftsmen whose temple at Memphis, known as the 'House of Ptah's Soul' - 'hut-ka-ptah' - is the origin of the word 'Egypt'.



### Thoth

**God of learning and the moon**

As the ibis-headed god of wisdom and patron of scribes, Thoth invented writing and brought knowledge to humans. His curved beak represented the crescent moon, and his main cult centre was Hermopolis.



### Neith

**Goddess of creation**

As a primeval creator deity represented by her symbol of crossed arrows and shield, warlike Neith, 'Mistress of the Bow', was worshipped at her cult centre Sais in the Delta.



### Amun

**God of Thebes**

Initially the local god of Thebes, whose name means 'the hidden one', Amun was combined with the Sun god Ra to become Amun-Ra, king of the gods and Egypt's state deity.



### Hathor

**Goddess of love, beauty and motherhood**

Often represented as a cow or a woman with cow ears, Hathor symbolised pleasure and joy and as a nurturing deity protected both the living and the dead.



### Sekhmet

**Goddess of destruction**

The lioness goddess Sekhmet controlled the forces of destruction and was the protector of the king in battle. Her smaller, more kindly form was Bastet the cat goddess, protector of the home.

**"Gods could be portrayed in animal or human form, or as a human with an animal's head"**



### Anubis

**God of embalming and the dead**

The black jackal god Anubis was the guardian of cemeteries and god of embalming, who helped judge the dead before leading their souls into the afterlife.



### Taweret

**Goddess of the home and childbirth**

Taweret was a knife-wielding hippopotamus goddess who guarded the home, a protector of women and children who was invoked during childbirth to scare away evil forces.



### Bes

**God of the home and childbirth**

Bes was a dwarf-like god of the household who protected women and children alongside Taweret, like her carrying knives for protection, in his case he carried musical instruments for pleasure.



### Maat

**Goddess of truth and justice**

As the deity who kept the universe in balance, Maat's symbol was an ostrich feather against which the hearts of the dead were weighed and judged in order to achieve eternal life.





# Temples of the gods

The Egyptians built temples as homes for their gods, believing their spirits resided inside their statues to which a constant stream of offerings were presented

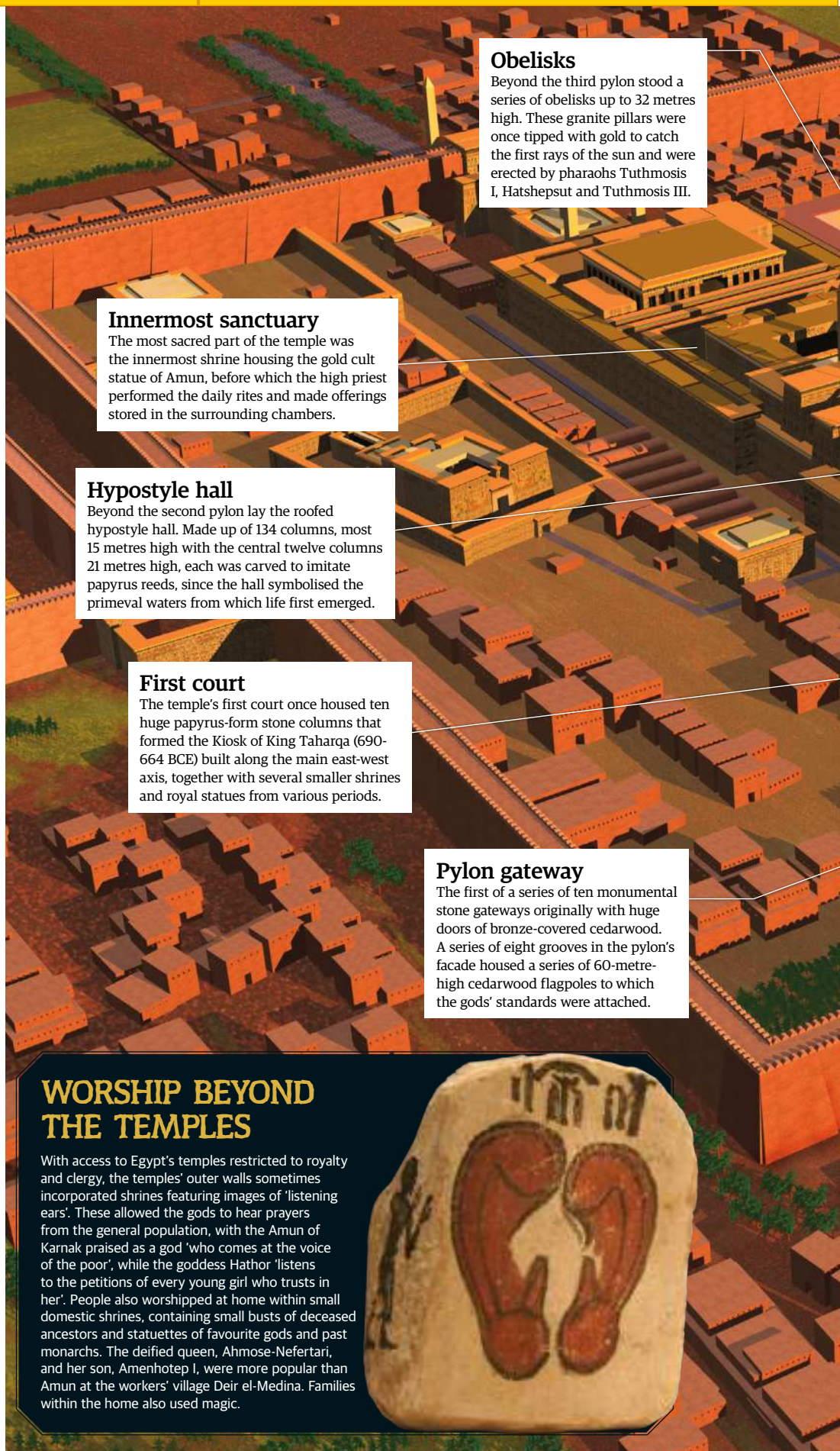
**A**s early as c. 3500 BCE, the Egyptians built temples for their gods. Initially made of wood and reeds, these soon became permanent structures of stone that formed the centre of almost every settlement throughout the Nile Valley.

Evolving over time into ever more elaborate structures, the Egyptians aligned their temples to their environment, to the cardinal points, and to the movement of the Sun and stars.

Each temple's sacred space was also enclosed by a huge exterior wall of mud-brick, within which the temple itself was made up of a series of successive stone-built shrines and courtyards. Accessed through pylon-shaped gateways once flanked by tall cedar wood flag poles and secured by huge cedar wood doors, the temple walls were covered in brightly painted scenes of gods and kings, and like their floors and ceilings, often inlaid with precious metals and gemstones.

Then, to heighten the sense of reverence, the temple layout became progressively smaller and darker until reaching the innermost sanctuary, which housed the gods' cult statues. These were believed to contain the gods' spirits, before which daily rituals were performed to maintain the divine presence and satisfy the gods who would in turn protect Egypt. With the gods in residence, the temples became storehouses of divine power that could then be redirected through rituals for the benefit of the whole country.

To keep these sacred spaces ritually pure, only royalty and designated clergy were allowed inside - the majority of ordinary people were confined to the temple's outer areas, where the main administrative buildings were located. For Egypt's temple complexes were not only religious centres, but their outer precincts a combination of town hall, library, university, medical centre and law court - places where people came together for the purposes of community life at the heart of which lay the spirits of the very gods themselves.



## Obelisks

Beyond the third pylon stood a series of obelisks up to 32 metres high. These granite pillars were once tipped with gold to catch the first rays of the sun and were erected by pharaohs Tuthmosis I, Hatshepsut and Tuthmosis III.

## Innermost sanctuary

The most sacred part of the temple was the innermost shrine housing the gold cult statue of Amun, before which the high priest performed the daily rites and made offerings stored in the surrounding chambers.

## Hypostyle hall

Beyond the second pylon lay the roofed hypostyle hall. Made up of 134 columns, most 15 metres high with the central twelve columns 21 metres high, each was carved to imitate papyrus reeds, since the hall symbolised the primeval waters from which life first emerged.

## First court

The temple's first court once housed ten huge papyrus-form stone columns that formed the Kiosk of King Taharqa (690-664 BCE) built along the main east-west axis, together with several smaller shrines and royal statues from various periods.

## Pylon gateway

The first of a series of ten monumental stone gateways originally with huge doors of bronze-covered cedarwood. A series of eight grooves in the pylon's facade housed a series of 60-metre-high cedarwood flagpoles to which the gods' standards were attached.

## WORSHIP BEYOND THE TEMPLES

With access to Egypt's temples restricted to royalty and clergy, the temples' outer walls sometimes incorporated shrines featuring images of 'listening ears'. These allowed the gods to hear prayers from the general population, with the Amun of Karnak praised as a god 'who comes at the voice of the poor', while the goddess Hathor 'listens to the petitions of every young girl who trusts in her'. People also worshipped at home within small domestic shrines, containing small busts of deceased ancestors and statuettes of favourite gods and past monarchs. The deified queen, Ahmose-Nefertari, and her son, Amenhotep I, were more popular than Amun at the workers' village Deir el-Medina. Families within the home also used magic.







## Temple of Khonsu

This smaller temple was built for Khonsu, son of Amun and his goddess wife Mut. With her temple located a little further south, it is connected to the temples of Khonsu and Amun by further sphinx-lined avenues.

## Temple harbour

Like most temples, Karnak was linked to the Nile by a canal which opened out into a harbour fronting the entrance. This allowed the gods' cult statues to travel in and out of the temple by water, and was also used for royal visits.

## Sphinx avenue

The processional route along Karnak's main east-west axis lined with sphinxes whose rams' heads symbolised Amun's sacred animal. Further sphinx-lined avenues ran along the temple's north-south axis to the temple of Amun's wife Mut, and a further five kilometres south to Luxor temple.

## THE FESTIVAL CALENDAR

### The Opening of the Year (New Year's Day)

**Month 1, day 1 (19 July)**  
The Egyptian New Year began with the start of the annual Nile flood, which brought water to the desert landscape and allowed crops to grow. With the floodwaters repeating the moment of creation, it was a time of national rejoicing when hymns claimed 'the whole land leaps for joy' and people threw flowers, offerings and even themselves into the water.

### Opet Festival

**Month 2, days 15-26 (September)**  
The Opet Festival began as an 11-day event when the cult statue of Amun was taken out of Karnak, accompanied by musicians, dancers, soldiers and the public. The procession travelled five kilometres south to the temple of Luxor, where the god's statue was joined by the pharaoh in secret ceremonies designed to replenish royal power, amidst feasting and rejoicing.

### The Festival of Khoiak

**Month 4, days 18-30 (November)**  
The Festival of Khoiak celebrated the life, death and resurrection of Osiris. Since this was based on the agricultural cycle in which the crops cut down were grown again, ceremonies included planting seeds in Osiris-shaped containers. It was celebrated when the Nile floodwaters were receding, leaving rich, black sediment on the riverbanks into which new crops were planted.

### Festival of Bastet

**Month 8, days 4-5**  
The cat goddess, Bastet, was closely linked to the lioness Sekhmet and cow-like Hathor, these deities' lively worship involving much singing, dancing and drinking - all key elements of Bastet's annual fertility festival. Boatloads of men and women would arrive at her cult centre Bubastis to celebrate, when it was reported that 'more wine is drunk at this feast than in the whole year'.

### Festival of the Valley

**New Moon, Month 10**  
At the annual Festival of the Valley, the cult statue of Amun was taken out from Karnak and across the Nile to Thebes's west bank. While it was here, the statue visited the tombs and temples of the previous kings that were buried there, accompanied by the local population, who would also visit the tombs of their own relatives to feast with their spirits and leave them food offerings.

### Festival of the Beautiful Meeting

**New Moon, Month 11**  
This festival celebrated the marriage between the god Horus of Edfu and goddess Hathor of Dendera. Beginning 14 days before the new moon, Hathor's cult statue was transported 70 kilometres south to Edfu temple, where it was placed beside the statue of Horus. 14 more days of festivities involved the participation of the royal family alongside the general population.



# Power of the priests

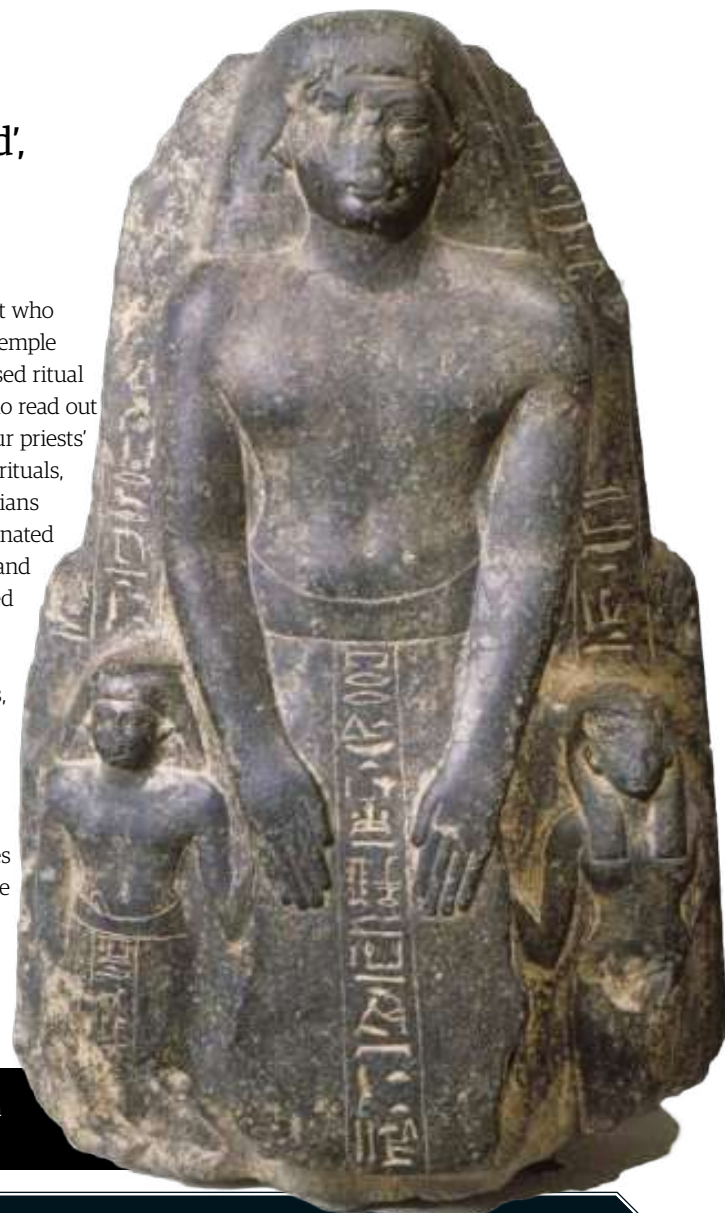
Ancient Egypt's priests were known as 'servants of god', who carried out religious rites before the gods' statues instead of a human congregation

**E**ach successive pharaoh was regarded as a child of the gods, and as the gods' representative on Earth, was also the supreme high priest of every temple. However, with so many different temples throughout Egypt, the pharaoh's duties had to be delegated to each temple's high priest, who was often a royal relative selected by the king to guarantee their loyalty.

Within large temples like Karnak or Memphis, the power of the priests was considerable, since the temples owned much land and the temple treasuries were very wealthy. The priests also controlled the gods' cult statues, which functioned as oracles, whose pronouncements were interpreted by the priests, and could pass judgment in legal cases and even influence royal succession. At times when the crown was weak, the high priests' powers became so great that some took on additional roles as military generals, whose struggles with the monarchy could lead to civil war.

Yet most of the time the priests carried out their role, helping the king maintain strong relations with the gods whose spirits were believed to dwell within their cult statues. Housed in the sanctuary at the innermost part of the temple, it was here that the high priest led daily rites, assisted by a staff of male and female clergy, from the 'god's

wife' priestess to the deputy high priest who oversaw supplies of offerings and the temple scribes who kept accounts and composed ritual texts. There were also lector priests who read out these texts, temple astronomers or 'hour priests' who calculated the correct timings for rituals, and temple dancers, singers and musicians who entertained the gods and impersonated them in ritual dramas wearing masks and elaborate costumes. Other staff included the temple gardeners, brewers, bakers and butchers who supplied the daily offerings, the temple weavers, jewellers, barbers and wig makers who supplied both the gods and their clergy, and the numerous craftsmen, carpenters and builders who undertook building work, carried out repairs and kept the temples in good order. In fact so numerous were such personnel that eventually over 100,000 people were employed in the upkeep of Egypt's three main temples of Karnak, Memphis and Heliopolis.



Priest Teti with his family: Teti is in the centre with his father the smaller figure on the left, also named Teti, and his mother, Meket, on the right

## MAGIC AND MEDICINE

Ancient Egyptian religion and magic were indistinguishable, and hidden forces in both were regarded as the main cause of illness

Although most communities had part-time medical men and 'wise women', people also slept in the temple's medical centre (sanatorium) in the hope they would be cured through divinely inspired dreams. These were interpreted by the priests, some of whom were also doctors. Since goddess Sekhmet controlled the forces of disease, her priests, believed capable of calming her, were therefore doctors specialising in diseases. Priests of the scorpion goddess Selket, patron of healers, cured bites and stings, while childhood illnesses were treated by invoking the mother goddess Isis, whose magic appears in various prescriptions including 'a remedy which Isis prepared for the headache of Ra'. Even deified mortals were believed to have such powers, from the polymath Imhotep claimed as a son of the god Ptah and later identified with the Greek god of medicine Asclepius to the official Amenhotep, credited with miracle cures a thousand years after his death. In most cases, treatment involved wearing amulets, reciting magical incantations and taking medicines made from all manner of ingredients, from water poured over gods' statues to sour milk and even crocodile dung.





## DAY IN THE LIFE OF A HIGH PRIEST

The high priest's day was a series of duties performed at set times to satisfy the gods who would then keep all things in order

### Night

#### Ritual ablutions

Since the priests had to bathe twice a day and twice at night, a fourth bath maintained ritual purity, while the hour priest astronomers monitored the night sky from the temple roof 'observatory'.

### Before dawn

#### Ritual ablutions

To be ritually pure, the priests bathed in the temple's sacred lake, shaved off all hair and gargled with natron salt solution, before dressing in linen robes and reed-woven sandals.

### Sunrise

#### Morning ceremony

At dawn the high priest entered the shrine and awoke the god's spirit in its statue. This was then cleansed, anointed and dressed, and offered the finest foods while frankincense was burned to purify the surroundings.

### Sunset

#### Evening ceremony

In a reverse of the morning ceremony, the high priest once more entered the shrine to put the god's spirit to rest, burning spicy kyphi incense to create a restful environment.

### Evening

#### Ritual ablutions

To maintain ritual purity throughout the day, the priests had to bathe once again before re-entering the gods' presence.

### Pre-noon

#### Reversion of offerings and ritual ablutions

Once the god had its fill of food offerings, these reverted to the priests as breakfast. Then to maintain ritual purity, the high priest bathed once again before re-entering the gods' presence.

### Noon

#### Midday ceremony

At noon, the high priest re-entered the shrine, this time burning myrrh resin while sprinkling water to further purify the temple's shrines and sacred spaces.

### Various times

#### Various rituals

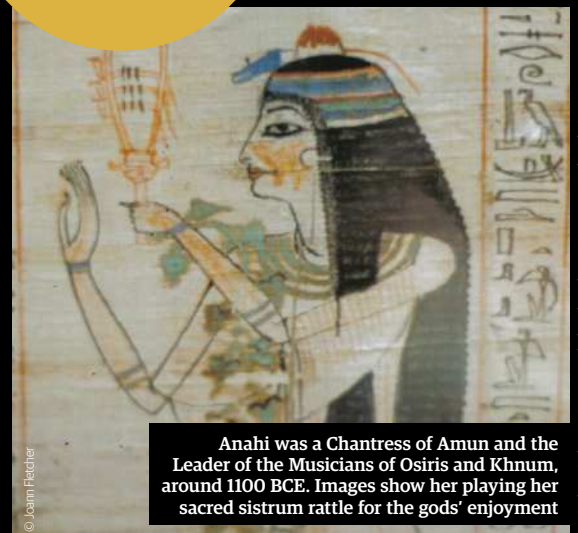
With numerous rituals performed by the high priest and clergy at various times, these were not only set by the 'hour priest' astronomers but carefully measured with a clepsydra water clock.

**"The high priests' powers became so great that [it] could lead to civil war"**

## PRIESTESSES

Women were priestesses to both goddesses and gods, undertaking similar roles to their male counterparts and receiving the same pay. The most common priestess title was 'chantress', with some women impersonating goddesses in rituals and the wives of high priests holding the title 'leader of the musical troupe'. Although most high priests were men, as were the lector priests who read out sacred texts, women held both these offices at times. Yet the most important priestess was the 'God's Wife', a title held by a succession of royal women acting as the human consort of the god Amun at Karnak. The God's Wife led

sacred processions with the king or his deputy the high priest, and like them could enter the innermost shrine to make offerings to keep the gods content. She also took an active role in defending Egypt by magical means, shooting arrows into ritual targets and burning images of enemies. As the role brought great wealth and prestige, kings appointed their sisters or daughters as God's Wife to enhance their own status. Eventually regarded as the equivalent of a king, shown with kingly sceptres, these women could delegate on the king's behalf, both within the temple and in matters of state.



Anahi was a Chantress of Amun and the Leader of the Musicians of Osiris and Khnum, around 1100 BCE. Images show her playing her sacred sistrum rattle for the gods' enjoyment





# Sacred animals of Ancient Egypt

The Ancient Egyptians held animals in the highest regard. Both pets and wild animals were incredibly important to Egyptian society, from mummified cats to chariot-pulling stallions



**T**here are various symbols that define Ancient Egypt's spectacular place in history.

The civilisation is remembered for the pyramids, the Sphinx, hieroglyphics, pharaohs and distinct afterlife beliefs. Another enduring element of Ancient Egypt is the role that animals played. Ranging from household pets to sacred figures, animals, both domesticated and wild, played a major part in the civilisation's evolution from small settlements on the banks of the Nile, into a sprawling kingdom.

Like today, cats and dogs were popular residents of Ancient Egyptian households. Many families had dogs as pets, but they also accompanied groups on hunts as well as being trained as guard dogs. It is thought that Egyptian hounds were ancestors of today's basenjis, greyhounds and mastiffs, and ancient inscriptions and hieroglyphics have included dog names like 'Brave One' and 'Reliable'.

Cats meanwhile, were slightly different. The Ancient Egyptians believed that felines watched over the home and were seen as spiritual guardians rather than pets. They were very helpful to the Ancient Egyptians, as they preyed on mice and birds and, along with ferrets, were used to keep granaries

and storehouses free of vermin. It was illegal to export cats out of the kingdom and there was even a branch of government created solely to stop any underground moggy smuggling. Killing a cat was a crime and anyone found to have done so was severely punished in front of a public audience. The death of a cat was mourned in the same way as a human and the family of the deceased feline's owner would all shave their eyebrows as a mark of respect.

Dog owners went one step further and mourned a loss by shaving all the hair on their whole body.

Cats were by no means the only sacred animal. Scarab beetles were considered to be just as revered, as were some birds of prey like falcons and hawks. Even some species of fish were seen as sacred and several kinds weren't eaten by the pharaoh and the nobility for religious reasons. Carp and catfish were eaten in high quantities but this was primarily by the lower classes.

As well as having a spiritual purpose, animals were domesticised to make daily life easier, especially in industry. The Ancient Egyptians were an agricultural civilisation and irrigation was used extensively and effectively using the water from the Nile. Donkeys were kept on farms as work

**The Ancient Egyptians believed that felines watched over the home and were seen as spiritual guardians rather than pets**

## SCARAB BEETLES

The study of these little critters lead the Ancient Egyptians to hold a different perspective on life and rebirth



Known as kheper, scarab beetles are an enduring image of Ancient Egypt. The insects are most famous for making their dung into a ball and pushing it around for their offspring to be hatched out of. Ancient Egyptians watched the scarab beetles' distinctive trait and related it to the idea of rebirth. The god Khepri was a scarab and he was tasked with pushing the Sun across the sky, causing sunrises and sunsets. The scarab beetle became one of the most important symbols in the entire civilisation and amulets were adorned with the image.

Some animals were deified according to Ancient Egyptian beliefs



© Alamy



## GODS IN THE SKY

The Ancient Egyptians were fond of birds of prey, as they lived between both heaven and earth

### Falcon

Falcons and hawks were the spiritual guardians of the pharaohs. Hieroglyphs show the birds of prey spreading their wings behind rulers and they were believed to be an incarnation of Horus, the god of the sky as well as Montu and Socar, the gods of protection and strength respectively.



### Vulture

Vultures were important birds to the Ancient Egyptians and stood for not one, but two gods. They portrayed the ideas of royalty and protection and the gods they illustrated were Nekhbet and Mut. Often depicted on temple ceilings, they were drawn with their wings stretched out.



### Ibis

Now extinct in modern-day Egypt, ibis were linked to Thoth, the god of knowledge. Common on the banks of the Nile, many have been found buried and mummified in ancient catacombs. They were also associated with the gods Tehuty and Djehuty who held the power of language and had the intelligence to educate and teach men new skills.



### Ostrich

As well as birds of prey, the Ancient Egyptians admired the world's largest land bird, the ostrich. The bird was seen as the embodiment of order and was aligned to the goddess Ma'at, who had an ostrich feather attached to her headdress. This garment was very popular with Egyptian women as a result.



animals to pull ploughs and stamp down seeds. Cattle were reared for their meat and milk and were a major part of the economy, with taxes put upon both their ownership and their trade. Farm animals like goats, sheep, pigs, and ducks were also eaten and used for fat, leather and wool but the chicken was not reared until the time of the New Kingdom. Some households kept monkeys as pets and they were trained to retrieve or steal things for their owners. Early Egyptian farmers even tried to domesticate hyenas, but this idea was short-lived as it soon became clear that these wild beasts could not be tamed in the same way as dogs.

The use of animals varied between regions. For instance, bee keeping was more popular in Lower Egypt and the insect soon became a symbol of this part of the kingdom. Honey was a widespread commodity and was used for food as well as makeup and medicine. Bee's wax was used to help mummification and was a very sought after resource. When an animal was killed, the Egyptians ensured that almost nothing was wasted with meat, milk, skin, fat, horns and even the dung all having a purpose.

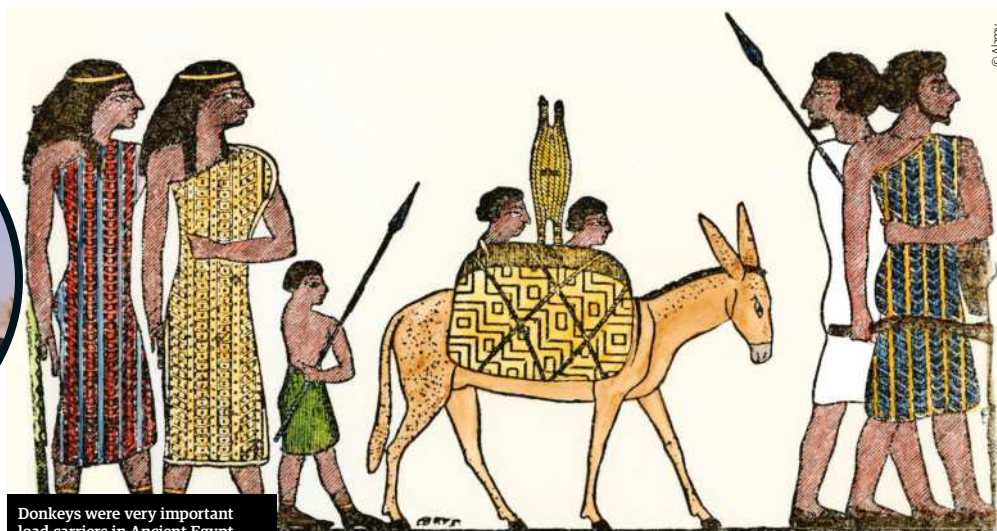
North Africa was home to many wild animals as well as the ones domesticated by the Egyptians. Jackals and snakes such as the asp were popular symbols of Ancient Egypt while antelope and gazelles were hunted for their meat. Dangerous animals such as lions, crocodiles and hippos occasionally came into contact with humans and the Nile was home to flourishing shoreline wildlife such as birds,

amphibians and insects. The Nile was vital to the Egyptian way of life and deadly crocodiles and aggressive hippos posed a major threat to traversing the waterway. Because of this, they were both respected highly. For pharaohs, lions and bulls represented their power. Images of a bull viciously trampling over others, or a lion successfully hunting its prey would symbolise the strength of the ruler and of the kingdom that they ruled.

A further use for animals was in warfare. At its peak, the Ancient Egyptian war machine was dominated by chariot-based combat. Powered by one or more horses brought in from conquered settlements, soldiers would wield bows, swords and spears from atop a chariot to cut down and trample enemy infantry. Chariots were one of the most powerful units on the battlefield before the advent of cavalry. Horses weren't initially native to North Africa and only arrived in Egypt after its borders expanded under the New Kingdom. Unlike later Ancient Greek and Roman warfare, horses were very rarely ridden and only the wealthy could afford a trusty steed of their own. Donkeys and mules were used more prominently to transport equipment and supplies both in war and at peace when working the land.

Animals played a major part in death traditions and like people, were often mummified. The Ancient Egyptians believed in an afterlife and anyone that died wanted their possessions taken with them. This included pets and animals they owned so animals as large as cattle were sacrificed, mummified and put into the tomb. In the afterlife, they would once again accompany their former owner. There were even different temples and cemeteries for all of the different animals that

Images of a lion successfully hunting its prey would symbolise the strength of the ruler and of their kingdom



Donkeys were very important load carriers in Ancient Egypt



## ANIMAL AGRICULTURE

The importance of cattle and other work animals made the Ancient Egyptians proficient at crop raising

Some of the first domesticated animals in human history came from Ancient Egypt. Husbandry was a vital part of Egyptian life and using the Nile as a valuable and enduring source of water, irrigation and animal rearing was mastered. Cattle were farmed in high numbers as were sheep, goats, pigs and in later years, horses. The cow in particular was an incredibly important farmyard animal to Egypt as they provided milk, meat, leather, fat and horns, all of which had

their uses in society. They pulled ploughs and would transport the wheat and barley grains that were produced during harvest season, which would produce both wheat and barley. Farmers had to be very protective of their cattle and they were so valuable that if left unmarked or even just unattended, they would often be taken by a rival farmer. As with many other animals, cows were sacred and were linked to the goddesses Hathor, Isis and Nut.

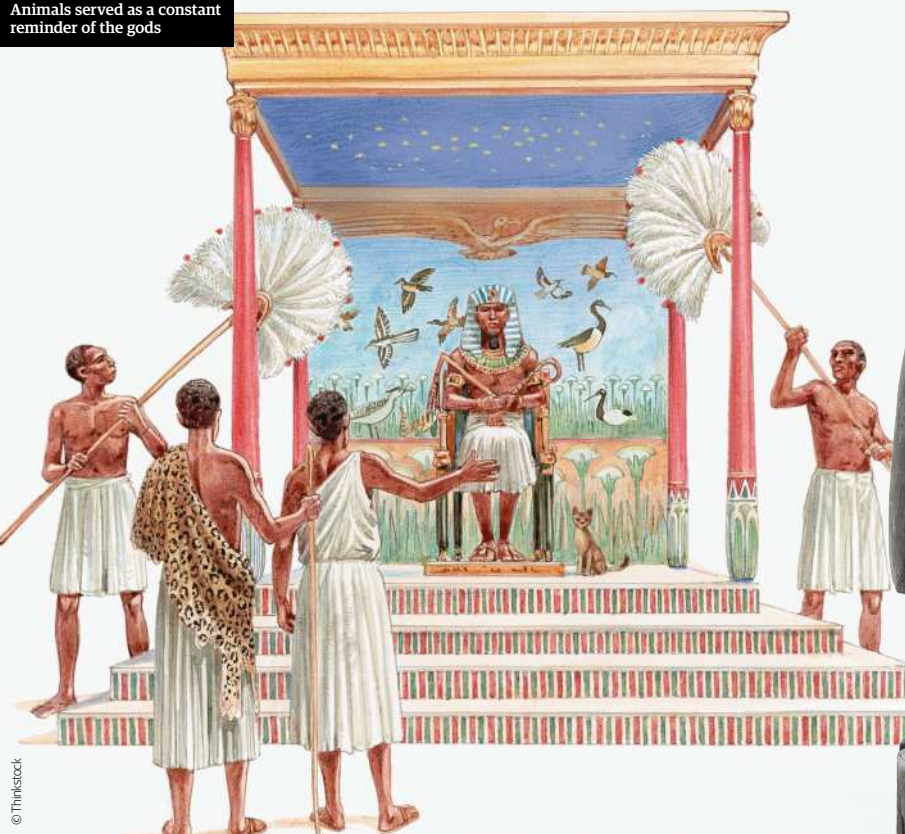


A multitude of birds could be found on the banks of the Nile and were held sacred by the Ancient Egyptians



Ancient Egyptians associated scarab beetles with creativity

Animals served as a constant reminder of the gods



© Thinkstock

didn't make it into their owner's list of wanted possessions to take to the afterlife.

Animals weren't just killed to escort their owner to the afterlife; they could also be their food on the journey to Duat, the realm of the dead. This was usually fish or fowl and both were mummified carefully so they would be preserved correctly. It was also believed that wild animals like crocodiles and hippos would be as much of a danger in the passage to the afterlife as they were during life.

Sacrifices were so common that during every year of Ramses III's 31 year reign, 16,000 cattle and 22,000 geese were sacrificed. Many animals were sacrificed to their corresponding gods. For instance, dogs were given as an offering to the jackal-headed Anubis, but cats were an exception and were never killed for the benefit of the gods. Over 8 million dog skeletons and 500,000 mummified ibises have been found by archaeologists in the catacombs of the Saqqara burial site.

Many Egyptian gods were believed to be in the image of animals native to Egypt and acted as their representatives in daily life. Bast had a cat's head and Sobek had a crocodile's head for example. Geese, who were one of the symbols of the god of the Earth, Geb, were given free run of the house and garden to ensure that the god was always happy.

The importance of animals to the Ancient Egyptians can still be seen in hieroglyphics and statues. It's still disputed whether animals and pets were worshipped as deities, but what is certain is that pets were beloved by the Egyptians and animals played a huge role in society.





# Magic & medicine

From bizarre treatments steeped in superstition to surgical procedures still in use today, this is the fascinating world of healing in Ancient Egypt

**T**ake a stroll through the history books and it's hard to ignore just how weird and gruesome the world of medicine was in ages gone by. And the kingdoms of Ancient Egypt were no exception, either. Over its 3,000 years of existence, Ancient Egypt became an epicentre for culture, art, architecture and engineering. Records, such as the Edwin Smith Papyrus, have revealed that the time of the pharaohs also produced an incredibly broad approach to ailments and disease. This was an age where science, magic and religion were one. Sages, physicians and healers were all part of the same potent superstition and created an ancient medicinal cabinet that aided health.

However, those medical treatments were all well and good if you could last long enough to actually receive it. The pharaohs may have been off conquering far away lands and building monuments that seemingly pierced the sky, but for the normal Egyptian folk who weren't lucky enough to bathe in milk and be washed in oils every day, the Egypt of the ancient world was a dangerous and merciless place to live. Diseases ran rife in cities, while deadly parasites lurked in the purportedly life-giving waters of the Nile. Egypt was a place of ambition and innovation, but it was also a land of death.

Life expectancy was, in a word, terrible. Records imply mortality rates in infants were catastrophically high, and for those who made it into adulthood, those senior years were short-lived

at best. Women tended to live no later than their early- to mid-20s, while men fared marginally better with mortality rates in the mid- to late-20s. These figures could well have worsened still during the 'dark periods' of Ancient Egyptian history (otherwise known as the First, Second and Third Intermediate Periods), when the breakdown in civil government and the influx of foreign people and external pathogens may have made such a poor situation even worse.

Much of our understanding comes from the preserved remains of Egypt's ancient citizens and nobles. It's from these age-old cadavers we can infer some intriguing details about the diseases and health hazards faced by those who won the mortality lottery of infancy and young adulthood. Infections of the eye were common, as one would expect living in a North African country surrounded by wind-whipped sand. Poisoning also seems to have been quite common, more from the treatments than anything else – scorpions and serpents were

sometimes used to treat afflictions, and some could cause blindness, paralysis and even death.

A number of instances of tuberculosis, or more specifically spinal tuberculosis have been found, as have traces of kidney stones (which can be deadly if not treated accordingly). Evidence also suggests outbreaks of polio, influenza and smallpox across the different eras of Ancient Egypt. Plague was an issue too, just as it was in medieval and early modern Europe, over a thousand years later. A 'year of pestilence' was recorded that made

**A healer wouldn't just tend to the rich and the poor – one discovered relief shows a physician attending the childbirth of a queen**





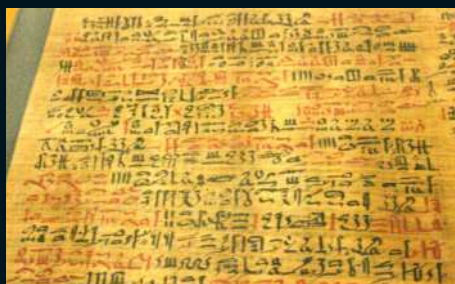






Priests and doctors weren't always one and the same, but many shared positions in both areas, such as this priest depicted treating a musician for blindness

## THE EBERS PAPYRUS



The papyri unearthed in the last few hundred years have radically changed our understanding of ancient Egyptian medicine. Egyptian doctors recorded countless procedures and diagnoses in detail, creating a unique insight into how a healer in this era identified and treated everything from inflammation to depression.

The Ebers Papyrus, purchased by German Egyptologist Georg Ebers in the winter of 1873-1874 in Luxor, is one such document. A 100-page scroll roughly 20 metres long, the papyrus dates back to around 1550 BCE, making it one of the oldest medical papyri ever discovered. Another early medical document, the Brugsch Papyrus (1300-1200 BCE) provides similar information to the Ebers.

The Ebers Papyrus covers a wide variety of ailments, illnesses and disorders, as well as over 700 remedies and treatments. It contains incantations and spells to banish disease-causing demons alongside incredibly detailed – and accurate – descriptions of the heart. The Egyptians correctly identified that the heart was at the centre of the body's blood supply. The papyrus also states that the heart is responsible for pumping four separate fluids around the body – blood, urine, tears and semen – much in the same way medieval doctors believed the body was based on a balance of very similar 'humours'.

reference to a potential outbreak of plague, but, like most aspects of a time this far in the past, it remains in conjecture.

Then there was the Nile. The lengthy river was the lifeblood of Ancient Egypt; it was thanks to its proximity that the earliest pharaohs could sow healthy crops in a Saharan environment, while turning the swampland of the Delta (a series of small rivers and tributaries that poured into the Mediterranean Sea) into one of the most agriculturally lush and fertile stretches of land in the world. And yet it also proved as much a danger to the Egyptians as a life-giving treasure.

The Nile was teeming with parasites, so for those who bathed in it or drank from it, the chances of becoming ill were likely considerable. Those who went wading through its cool waters, most notably along the irrigation channels, were in danger of crossing paths with parasites like the *Schistosoma* worm. This dastardly little blighter would bore its way through your feet or legs and lay eggs in your bloodstream. These worms would hatch and work their way through the body, causing a terrible amount of harm and making the host sick and frail. And for those who dared to drink water from wells that drew on the Nile, they risked the chance of ingesting guinea worms. Female guinea worms would often travel through the body to a suitable nesting site, usually the legs, and force a host into a weak and sickened state.

So how did the Egyptians hold back the shadow of Osiris, the god of death? Despite their distant place in history, Ancient Egyptians were quite advanced in their ability to diagnose a variety of ailments and illnesses (both long-forgotten and familiar). The remedies they used were almost entirely drawn from nature, so many of them have survived to today as modern herbal medicines and alternative treatments.

Almost all of our knowledge of these diagnoses come from the incredibly detailed records in the Edwin Smith Papyrus (c. 1600 BCE), the Berlin Medical Papyrus (c. 1250 BCE), the Kahun Papyrus (c. 1900 BCE), the London Medical Papyrus (c. 1250 BCE) and the Ebers Papyrus (c. 1600 BCE) – each of which details the Egyptians' knowledge of disease, anatomy and healing. These texts express an incredibly precise understanding of human anatomy – the practice of mummification gave those involved a deeply intimate knowledge of the body's composition and natural balances.

And considering that many physicians were also priests, it seems possible surgeons would have cut their teeth in the sanctity of mummification before getting to grips with the living. And that intimate knowledge was what gave the Ancient Egyptian healer the power to deal with almost any ailment.

"When you come across a swelling of the flesh in any part of the body of a patient and your patient is clammy and the swelling comes and goes under the finger," reads the Ebers Papyrus (c. 1500 BCE)

**Some prescriptions were remarkably close to modern standards, but some were bizarre – such as the use of bacteria-filled dung**



in regards to diagnosing swelling and a potential tumour, "then you must say to your patient: 'It is a tumour of the flesh. I will treat the disease. I will try to heal it with fire since cautery heals'. When you come across a swelling that has attacked a channel, then it has formed a tumour in the body. If when you examine it with your fingers, it is like a hard stone, then you should say: 'It is a tumour of the channels. I shall treat the disease with a knife.' "

The use of fire remains an alarming means of treating any sort of swelling, but the most striking element is the bedside manner. Here we see an aspect of Ancient Egyptian medicine that's often missing from medical information from other ancient cultures, and one that typifies the importance of sages, healers and physicians in Egyptian society. During this time, the mental welfare of a patient was just as important as the ailment that was affecting them physically.

Surgery was another important factor of day-to-day Ancient Egyptian medical practice. More importantly, it wasn't a speciality as it is now, but a necessity for every physician to know and practise whenever and wherever it was needed. Most procedures that took place, according to the evidence we have to draw from, were focused on external trauma, and none was ever conducted inside the body. Interestingly, many of the surgical procedures we commonly see today - eye surgery, dental surgery and those involving childbirth - were either never performed or no evidence has been found to confirm their existence at this time. More bizarre still is that no records exist relating to dental or eye surgeries involving nobles or even the

pharaohs themselves - an especially curious factor when you consider the importance of the eye in Egyptian symbolism. The only evidence is the use of topical remedies for eye maladies and nothing more.

Surgery became an advanced part of Ancient Egyptian medical practice because, unlike other civilisations at this

stage in their development, the Egyptians had already developed a robust written language. This enabled physicians and healers to record certain diagnoses and treatments, and mark those that worked and those that didn't. Sadly, no early medical textbooks have survived from this period, but texts such as the Edwin Smith Papyrus are believed to have been based on such notes and collected experience, hence the importance they play in our understanding of how such practices were conducted.

The Egyptians divided potential surgery cases into three separate categories: treatable, contestable and untreatable. A treatable case was something a physician could solve immediately, while a contestable diagnosis was based on the assessment that a patient could survive in their current state. If the patient showed resilience, a healer could then select the appropriate surgical procedure to conduct. All surgeries were topical only. No invasive procedures were performed, purely because no forms of anaesthetic were available at the time, save alcohol. We know that the Egyptians reset bones with splints and stitched up large open wounds and complications of the skin. They were also, rather unsurprisingly, extremely adept at the use of bandages.

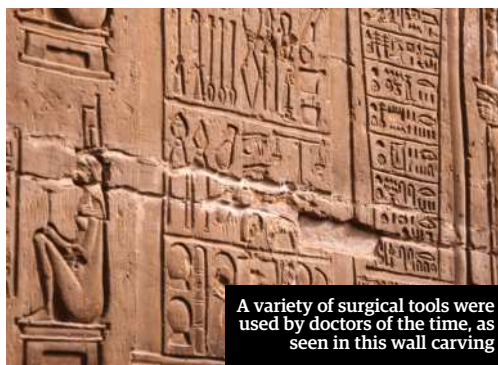
But that doesn't mean healers weren't afraid of using a blade as part of their treatment. The practice of circumcision was also performed by physicians. Although we don't know whether this was ever performed as a cultural or religious requirement, but the recovered papyri make frequent reference to the uncircumcised nature of foreign peoples who they encountered.

A number of tools recovered from across the Ancient Egyptian eras have been identified as being involved in the rituals of mummification, which was a process in which internal surgery would have been required. Some of the tools recovered, including early forms of scalpel, suggest that such instruments must have existed for

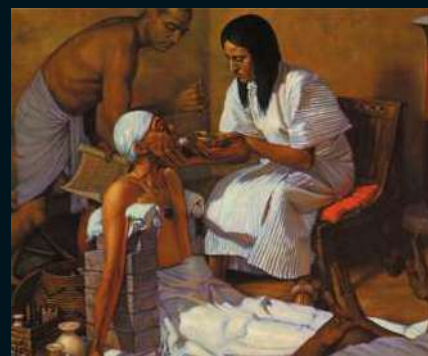
**The healing arts were a closely guarded profession and many doctors passed the knowledge down from father to son**



Ancient Egyptian doctors purportedly kept their remedies and ointments in travel kits for home visits



A variety of surgical tools were used by doctors of the time, as seen in this wall carving



A startling level of patient care was employed by ancient Egyptian healers

## DAY IN THE LIFE OF A HEALER

### 06:00 am

Since medicine was deeply rooted in the religious doctrine of ancient Egyptian society, a healer would have likely begun their day in the temple. Sekhmet, the goddess of healing, would have been the likely point of tribute, as well as other smaller deities such as Heka or Serket.

### 08:00 am

A doctor would have treated anyone with an ailment, but it is likely the elite would have been the priority on a given day. We could easily expect a healer to be called into the home of a noble or even the palace in the middle of the night, should an incident arise.

### 10:00 am

Doctors of this time may have operated from a specific building (especially for procedures and surgeries), but they would have often conducted house calls around the city. As you would expect, a healer would bring a number of pre-prepared remedies and tools with them.

### 12:00 pm

A healer would also take the time to meet local and foreign traders in the markets or bazaars of the principality they work in. The success of a doctor's practice depended on the resources at their disposal, and it's likely they would source rarer items from traders and merchants.

### 15:00 pm

A doctor might be called upon to operate on soldiers in times of war, or even those injured during the construction of a monument. Since no anaesthetics were available at the time, alcohol was used to dull the pain. Surgical procedures would be bloody, but doctors were proficient in treating wounds and amputations.

### 19:00 pm

With most of his major cases and responsibilities taken care of, a doctor might have returned to the temple to consult with High Priests, or to simply find a quiet moment to reflect and be at one with the gods. A healer might have also had duties to attend to at the temple itself.



circumcisions, amputations and other operations to be performed.

Alongside the removal of cysts and tumours, cases of amputations being performed have been recorded. There was also a good chance of surviving such a gruesome experience; the experience of the Egyptian physician and a vast knowledge of the medicinal properties of the natural resources around them meant that these ancient GPs were capable of treating incredibly severe problems. An amputee, for instance, would have had their wound treated with willow or even cauterised in some cases.

That knowledge of natural remedies stretched far beyond surgery and fed into the everyday practices of a local healer. Mint and caraway were used to treat chest pains; mustard seeds, aloe and juniper were used to treat headaches; poppy seeds were used in the treatment of both insomnia and burns; camphor counteracted bouts of vomiting; mustard seeds were used as emetic when needed, while mint was used to stop the effects. As Egypt expanded its borders during the Old, Middle and New Kingdoms,

new ingredients and remedies would have become available as traders from Libya, Canaan, Nubia and those from further afield in Asia arrived in Egypt.

However, all these records of anatomical knowledge and practical remedies seem to fly in the face of the deeply religious fabric of

Ancient Egyptian society. Magic formed as much a part of the Egyptian view

of the universe as science, so it's unsurprising that this broad theological view informed the practice of medicine.

The presence of demons or malevolent spirits were sometimes presented or diagnosed as being the cause of a particular ailment. By mindset, Egyptian doctors took a monistic view of ailments:

there was no mental or physical distinction. That's not to say that these ancient healers ignored the welfare of the mind - the

translations that make reference to putting the patient at ease and exploring the problem with them drive this point home - however, we can infer the mind was seen as a victim of an ailment rather than the actual cause. This does raise questions as to how the Ancient Egyptians would have approached or dealt with cases of mental health disorders, but with the intrinsic link to the most powerful churches of the time, consultation with High Priests and the visitation of temples to pray for divine intervention would be considered.

Practices also relied on a process known as 'sympathetic magic'. Like many other cultures, the Ancient Egyptians held a great deal of respect

and admiration for the animal kingdom and believed the positive traits of a particular beast (courage, resilience, a hardy constitution) could be transmuted by the consumption or application of its flesh. For instance, a pig's eye might be used as part of a treatment to cure blindness, with the hope the animal's sight would pass over to the patient.

These practices, from the reciting of incantations to the application of a salve or remedy, all fed into the basic way in which a doctor viewed a patient's being: the channel theory. The concept worked much in the same way as the Buddhist chakra or the medieval European theory of 'balancing the humours'. The body, mind and soul were viewed as one, and were a series of 46 physical channels that ran through the body and intersected at the heart. In other words, they meant veins, arteries and intestines. It was a commonly held belief that demons and other forces would block these channels, causing internal strife.

Of course, the diagnosis of internal spiritual strife could easily be taken as a shorthand for Ancient Egyptian doctors having to balance a lack of understanding of more complicated medical issues with an intrinsic need to appease the deep-seated religious DNA of the time. It was perhaps their way of consolidating the two ideas.

Whatever the reasoning may have been, the healer of Ancient Egypt remains one of the most intriguing members of its society. And so it seems rather fitting that Imhotep, the polymath physician (a man often cited as the first true pioneer of medicine) would be deified a thousand years after his death and become a symbol of healing and care. The archetype of the Egyptian physician was just that: an individual of many talents who straddled multiple principles while bringing healing to the people of the kingdom.

**The Ancient Egyptians seemingly had a remedy for everything, including the use of aloe to treat epileptic fits**



Most remedies and medicines administered by an Egyptian healer were taken from nature - such as the pressing and grinding of flowers

**"Magic formed as much a part of the Egyptian view of the universe as science"**

## **Defining moment** **Peseshet in control** **2500 BCE**

Peseshet, who lived during the Fourth Dynasty, is the first recorded woman to have been involved in medicine. Some credit her as a physician, but she was officially recorded as the 'lady overseer of the female physicians'. This reference alone is staggering - not only was Peseshet involved in the burgeoning medical marvels of her time, but there was also a contingent of female physicians in operation then. We know she existed because her son Akhethotep, an important dignitary, kept her stele in his *mastaba* in Giza.

## **Timeline**

2750 BCE

### **First recorded surgery performed**

According to the Edwin Smith Papyrus and other resources, the very first instance of topical surgery is performed by an Egyptian physician.  
**c.2750 BCE**

### **Imhotep is born**

Around this time, the polymath and architect of Egypt's first pyramid is born. Imhotep is also rumoured to have authored the Edwin Smith Papyrus.  
**2650 BCE**

### **Imhotep becomes healing demigod**

Roughly a century after his death, the pioneer of Egyptian medicine becomes semi-deified as a god of healing and medicine.  
**2500 BCE**

### **Kahun Papyri written**

A collection of texts is gathered together around the time of Amenemhat III's reign. These documents include a selection of hymns and medical records.  
**1825 BCE**

### **Kahun Gynaecological Papyrus written**

Sometimes considered part of the Kahun Papyri, but an intriguing document in its own right, the Kahun Gynaecological Papyrus deals exclusively with women's health in ancient Egypt.  
**1800 BCE**

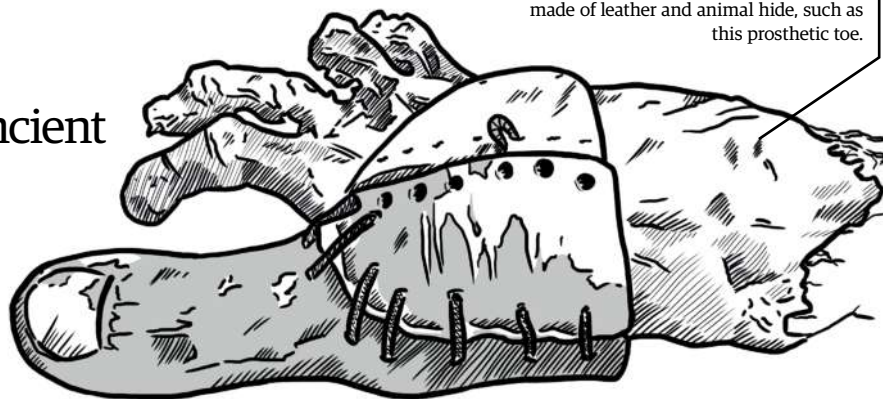


# Tools of the trade

Taking a look inside the Ancient Egyptian healer's toolbox

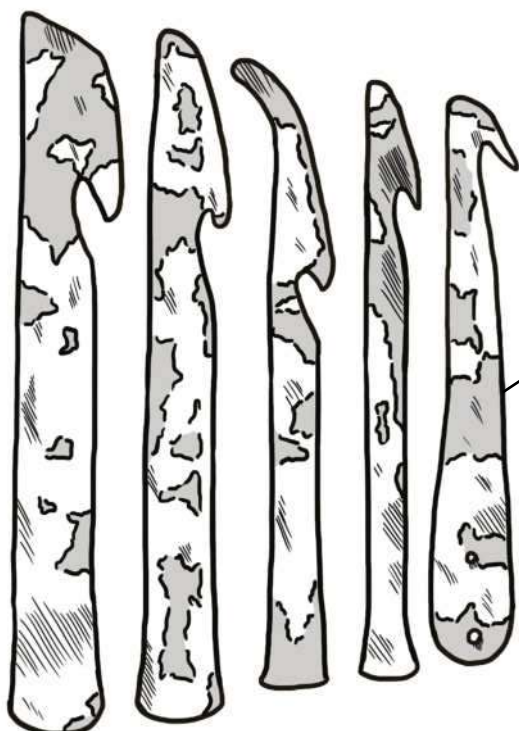
## Prosthetics

Since amputations were a common procedure performed by healers, prosthetics also played an important part in the rehabilitation process. Some were made of wood or wax, but many were made of leather and animal hide, such as this prosthetic toe.



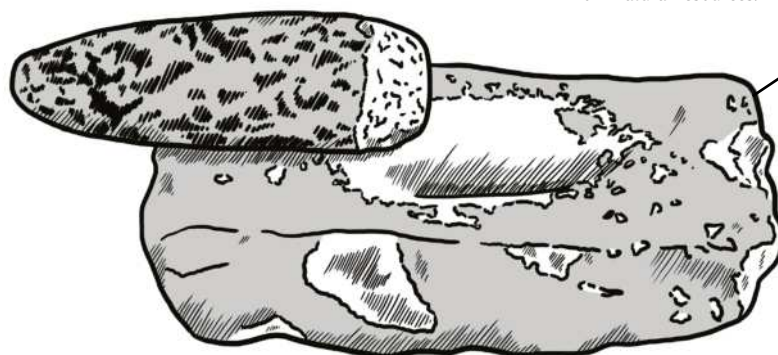
## Scalpels and blades

While cutting tools were common in the practice of mummification, they were also an important part of a healer's medicine bag. Blades such as these would have been used to bleed blisters, cut away abscesses and more.



## Pestle and mortar

The mortar and pestle played a vital part in a healer's everyday life – salves and pastes were often made from natural resources.



## Defining moment

### Edwin Smith Papyrus written 1600 BCE

This papyrus remains the most detailed and enlightening medical text recovered from the time of the pharaohs. It details 48 case histories, covering everything from infections to serious trauma. It lists the procedures for assessing a patient, including the recording of visual clues and smelling the wound, as well as the taking of the pulse. Interestingly, it is in the Edwin Smith Papyrus that the word 'brain' appears for the first time in recorded history.



## Defining moment

### Herodotus visits Egypt 440 BCE

Greek historian Herodotus visits Egypt during the reign of King Cambyses II (the Persian monarch who successfully invaded and conquered Egypt) and spends most of his time in the Delta region. He records details of the mummification process and the practice of medicine at the beginning of the Persian occupation. However, some of his findings have been contradicted by archaeological discoveries.



#### Ebers Papyrus written

One of the oldest and most influential of the recorded medical papyri, the document is later bought from a dealer in Luxor (Thebes) in 1873.

1600 BCE

#### Berlin Medical Papyrus written

The Berlin Medical Papyrus, otherwise known as the Brugsch Papyrus, is a companion document to the Ebers' scroll and includes information on fertility and contraception.

1250 BCE

#### London Medical Papyrus written

This particular document mainly deals with remedies and treatments and lists a total of 61 recipes. 25 of these are considered 'medical', while the others are magical in nature.

800 BCE

#### Homer references Egypt

More of an epic poet than a traditional historian, Homer nonetheless includes references to Egyptian healers in *The Odyssey*, stating that "In Egypt, the men are more skilled in medicine than any of human kind."

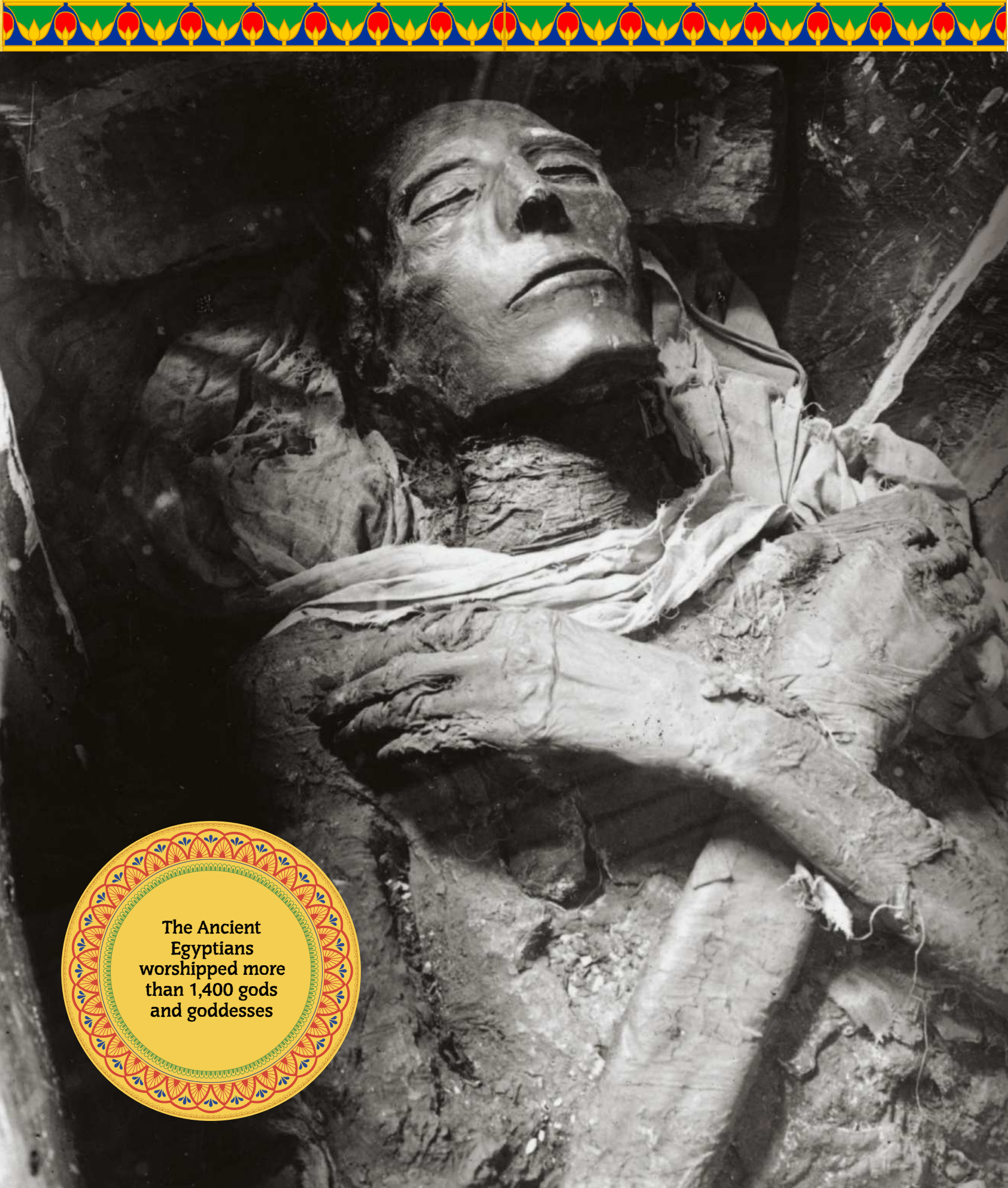
800 BCE

#### Rosetta Stone decrypted

The Rosetta Stone is finally decoded, proving an invaluable cypher for reading and translating hieroglyphics. From this discovery, the famous medical papyri would spill their secrets.

1822





The Ancient  
Egyptians  
worshipped more  
than 1,400 gods  
and goddesses



# Death, burial & the afterlife

It was home to a thriving civilisation, but it was in the land beyond the grave that the Egyptians believed they truly came to life

**B**eneath the burning hot sands of the Eastern Desert lie the remains of one of the greatest civilisations the world has ever seen. The Ancient Egyptians flourished along the banks of the River Nile between the third and first millennia BCE, with an empire that stretched as far north as modern-day Syria and as far south as Nubia in northern Sudan.

These people led rich lives. The fertile soil gave rise to a thriving agricultural society that developed some of the most advanced farming techniques of the ancient world. Their building projects were unparalleled, and they forever altered the Egyptian skyline with their towering temples and imposing pyramids. Their armies were undefeated, their science was revolutionary, and their art provided a blueprint for the Renaissance masters.

But it was in death that the Egyptians believed they truly lived. Their faith in the afterlife was unshakeable, but entry was not guaranteed. The spirit of the dead would first have to navigate through a perilous underworld, battling gods,

monsters and gatekeepers until it reached the Hall of Judgement. Here, it would be brought before 42 divine judges, to whom it would have to prove its worthiness for the afterlife. If successful, the spirit could then proceed to the Weighing of the Heart ceremony. Its heart, which contained a record of all its good and bad deeds, was weighed against the feather of the goddess Ma'at. If the heart was heavier, it was thrown to the crocodile-headed demoness Ammut and the soul was cast into the darkness. If the scales balanced, the soul could pass on to the Field of Rushes - a heavenly reflection of life on Earth.

With so much to compete with in death, the Ancient Egyptians spent their lives preparing for it. As well as trying to avoid sin, funerary items were purchased, coffins were commissioned and tombs were built, many of which were more elaborate than their earthly homes.

But it's the preparation of the body itself after death that continues to capture the imagination; it is at the centre of our enduring fascination with death in Ancient Egypt.



# Mummification

The gory embalmment process was able to produce mummies that would last for eternity

**E**ternal life wasn't just about preserving the spirit. The deceased's body also had to be preserved, as the Ancient Egyptians believed the soul (ba) and life force (ka) had to return to it regularly to survive. To prevent the body decaying, it underwent a lengthy and gruesome mummification process. Developed and refined over millennia, it allowed Ancient Egypt to produce some of the best-preserved mummies in the world, and we can now gaze upon the faces of men, women and children almost exactly as they were more than 2,000 years ago.

The first mummies in Egypt date back to approximately 3500 BCE. Before that time, all citizens regardless of social status were buried in desert graves, which allowed natural preservation to occur through dehydration. An artificial method known as embalmment was then developed that would ensure even better

preservation and allow bodies to be kept within tombs. The most complicated mummification process was developed in about 1550 BCE, and is considered the best method of preservation. With this method, the internal organs were removed, the flesh dehydrated, and then the body was wrapped in linen strips. This was an expensive process that took about 70 days to complete, so only the very rich could afford it. Working class people were treated with an alternative method of preservation that involved liquidising the internal organs with cedar tree oil, draining them out through the rectum and then placing the body in a salty substance called natron to dehydrate it.

Embalming took place in the Red Land, a desert region away from the heavily populated areas and with easy access to the Nile. Upon death, the body would be carried to the Ibu, or the

'Place of Purification', where it would be washed in river water. It was then taken to the per nefer, or 'house of mummification', which was an open tent to allow for ventilation. Here it was laid out on a table ready to be dissected by the embalmers. These men were skilled artisans who had a deep knowledge of anatomy and a steady hand. They were also often priests, as performing religious rites over the deceased was an equally important part of the embalming process. The most experienced priest carried out the major parts of mummification, like the wrapping of the body, and wore a jackal mask as he did so. This symbolised the presence of Anubis - god of embalming and the afterlife - during the mummification.

## 01 Purify the body

Before the embalmment process can begin, the body is washed in water from the Nile and palm wine.

## 02 Remove the internal organs

A small incision is made in the left side of the body and the liver, lungs, intestines and stomach are removed. They are then washed and packed in natron before being placed in canopic jars. The heart is left in the body as it is believed to be the centre of intelligence, and will be needed in the afterlife.

## 03 Discard the brain

A rod is inserted through the nostril into the skull and used to break apart the brain so that it can drain out of the nose. The liquid is then thrown away as it is not thought to be useful.

## 04 Leave to dry

The body is stuffed and covered with natron, a type of salt, which will absorb any moisture. It is then left for 40 days to dry out.

## 05 Stuff the body

Once again, it is washed in water from the Nile and covered with oils to help the skin stay elastic. The natron is scooped out and the body is then stuffed with sawdust and linen to make it look lifelike.

08

03

07

When a pet cat died, the household would shave off their eyebrows to signify their loss



## THE EGYPTIAN EMBALMER'S GUIDE TO AMULETS

These charms were placed between the mummy's layers of linen, but what did each one do?



### The Heart

This protected the heart, believed to be the most important organ. The underside was often inscribed with spells from the Book of the Dead that would help the spirit navigate the underworld.



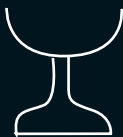
### The Knot of Isis

Knots were regularly used as amulets as it was believed they bound and released magic. They were said to protect the wearer from harm, and were placed on the neck.



### The Djed

This represented the backbone of Osiris, the god of the afterlife. It was wrapped close to the spine and enabled the mummy to sit up in the afterlife, ensuring its resurrection.



### The Headrest

According to the Book of the Dead, if placed under the neck, this amulet provided physical comfort for the deceased and also prevented them from being decapitated.



### The Collar

This was placed on the mummy's neck and allowed it to free itself of its bandages in the afterlife.



### The Papyrus Sceptre

The papyrus plant represented new life and resurrection. It was believed to give the dead the energy and vitality to survive the terrifying ordeals of the underworld.



### The Two Fingers

Placed near to the incision through which the organs were removed, these may have been intended to 'hold' the incision sealed and prevent evil spirits from entering the body.



### The Serpent

This was placed anywhere on the body and prevented the spirit from being bitten by snakes in the underworld.



### The Frog

This was believed to contain the powers of Heqet, the frog-headed goddess of life and fertility. When placed on the mummy, it would allow it to be brought back to life.



01

05

06

### 08 Say a prayer

A priest reads spells out loud while the body is being wrapped in order to ward off evil spirits. He will often wear a mask of Anubis - the god associated with the embalming process and the afterlife.

### 07 Add amulets

Charms called amulets are placed in between the layers to protect the body during its journey to the afterlife.

### 06 Wrap in linen

First, the head and neck are wrapped in strips of linen, then the fingers and toes. The arms and legs are wrapped separately before being tied together. Liquid resin is used as glue.

02

## Animal mummies

The Ancient Egyptians believed that many of their gods and goddesses could live on Earth in animal form. The god Amun could take the form of a goose or ram, the god Thoth could be an ibis or baboon, and the goddess Bastet took the form of a cat. These animals were treated like deities, and when they died, they were mummified just like humans. In the Late Period (661-332 BCE), animal mummies were produced commercially and sold for use as offerings. X-rays reveal that the animals were clearly bred for the purpose and some were deliberately killed. Many of the mummies that survive today contain only tiny fragments of bone, or are entirely empty, suggesting that demand for these sacred items must have outstripped supply.





A stone sarcophagus inside a tomb in the Valley of the Kings

## Burial

The Ancient Egyptians' resting place could be nothing short of what they experienced in life

**L**ong before their deaths, wealthy Egyptians built luxurious tombs for themselves and filled them with objects that would protect and assist them in the afterlife. This ranged from simple items like bowls, combs and clothing to chariots, furniture, weapons and jewellery. The treasures found in Ancient Egyptian tombs are among some of the most valuable in the world, and show that status symbols were considered just as important for the afterlife as they had been on Earth. Food was also stored in the tomb and left as offerings after the tomb had been sealed in order to sustain the life force (ka) - one of the five elements that made up the human soul. Even depictions of food painted onto the walls of the tomb were believed to provide nourishment for the dead.

The day of burial was when the deceased moved from the world of the living to the world of the dead. Both poor and rich were given a ceremony of some kind, as it was considered essential in order for the spirit to pass to the afterlife. Wealthy and royal Egyptians received an elaborate funeral,

during which a procession of mourners and dancers accompanied the coffin to a tomb, which was either below ground or within a mastaba or pyramid. Also present were two women called 'kites', whose job was to mourn overtly and inspire others to do the same. Remembrance of the dead ensured passage to the afterlife, and displays of grief were thought to help the deceased's cause in the Hall of Judgement.

On arrival at the burial site, a priest performed the Opening of the Mouth ceremony. The mummy was propped upright while spells were uttered and a ceremonial blade pressed against the mouth (to allow it to breathe, eat and drink), eyes (to allow it to see) and limbs (to allow it to move). Food and gifts that would assist the spirit in the afterlife

were then offered and a funerary banquet was held. Finally, the coffin was carried into the tomb, where royal mummies would be placed within a stone sarcophagus. This was intended to provide an extra layer of protection against grave robbers, who were rife in the Nile valley. Spells and prayers were recited, and then the tomb sealed, never to be opened again... or so they hoped.

**Tombs contained everything needed in the afterlife, including toilets**

Mummy of a man who lived during the Ptolemaic Period



### Shabti

These figurines were buried alongside the dead, and were believed to act as servants in the afterlife. They could be made of wood, clay or stone and were often quite small, although earlier life-sized models have been found. Many of them are depicted carrying hoes and baskets, as Ancient Egyptians believed that in the afterlife they would be allocated a plot of land that they would have to farm and maintain. Over 1,000 of them were found in pharaoh Taharqa's tomb alone, making them one of Ancient Egypt's most common artefacts.



# The many layers of a mummy

Mummification was not the final step in the quest for eternal life. The body would be placed in several cases and coffins - sometimes up to eight - before eventually being laid to rest



## 01 Objects for the afterlife

Once the body had been wrapped in layers of linen, items like jewellery and daggers were placed on the mummy for use in the afterlife. A scarab amulet was hung from the neck to help guide the soul during the Weighing of the Heart ceremony.



## 02 Cartonnage case

After mummification, a cartonnage case was created. This was formed around a straw and mud core, to which plaster and linen bandages soaked in resin or animal glue was applied, similar to papier mâché. Once it set, the case was split open, the stuffing removed and the body placed inside.



## 03 Decoration

Another cartonnage case was added and then a layer of plaster or gesso - made from resin and chalk powder - was painted over the top. Natural dyes like indigo, madder and ochre were used to create intricate designs on the cartonnage, particularly depictions of the god of the underworld, Osiris.



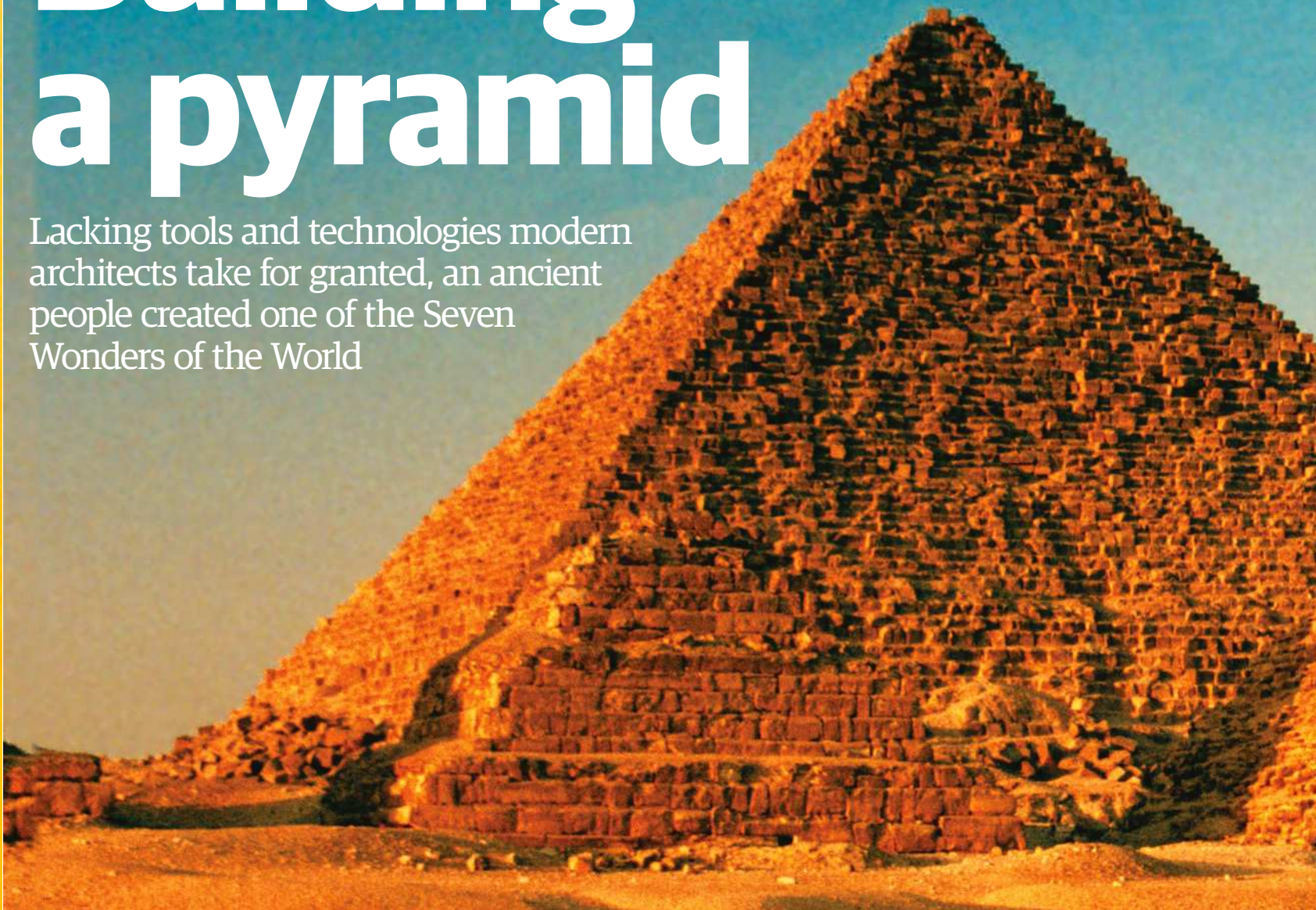
## 04 Wooden coffin

The body was placed in an anthropoid wooden coffin. Those of royalty may have been painted with gold leaf and decorated with precious jewels. A death mask made of cartonnage, wood or precious metals was placed on the head to ensure that its soul could recognise its body.



# Building a pyramid

Lacking tools and technologies modern architects take for granted, an ancient people created one of the Seven Wonders of the World



**T**he god-king's legacy is complete. The immense life-giving river that flows nearby - later to be called the Nile - has by now had people farming its banks for about two and a half millennia. Like almost every pyramid, it rises from the Nile's west bank, the place where the sun 'dies' each evening. Later visitors will see an exterior of ascending ochre-brown bricks, for its outer surface of reflective limestone will have long ago been stripped away. Today it gleams white in the sunshine.

What will one day be called the Great Pyramid of Giza is located on a plateau, south of the future city of Cairo. Paintings and postcards will later on create an impression of windswept loneliness, where pyramids are set amid uninhabited desert.

In reality, both then and now, the structure looms over a sprawl of human activity. For over 20 years, thousands of men have laboured to get around 2.3 million blocks in position at a rate of around 300 stones per day. Contrary to later myth, these people are not slaves sweating under the whip, but paid workers, some of whom possess specialist skills. Two settlements rise nearby, one for permanent workers and their families, the other for the migrants who work here for a few months at a time.

The god-king is called Khufu, although he will also be known as Cheops. Around seven centuries before his birth, the unification of a southern and northern kingdom had created a dynasty with mighty pharaonic rulers at the helm. In this time,

the Early Dynastic period has given way to what will be called the Old Kingdom.

It was the Old Kingdom pharaoh Djoser who ordered the building of the first 'step' pyramid at Sakkara, 20 kilometres south of here. That design, involving receding platforms, was the work of Imhotep, one of the few Egyptians - besides the pharaohs themselves - who will one day be venerated as a god. As vizier (chief official) to the pharaoh, Imhotep also excelled as an astronomer and physician. In the latter capacity he wrote a text that describes the treatment of over 200 illnesses.

But not even a god-king is spared his or her mortality. That, above all, is the purpose of the pyramid. The pharaoh's soul is destined to reach an after-world called Sekhet Aaru (meaning 'the Field



“Khufu has been planning his ‘house of eternity’ since ascending the throne”

The Great Pyramid was the world's tallest man-made structure until Lincoln Cathedral was built in 1311

The pyramids of Giza were once clad in limestone, which made them gleam white in the sun

of Reeds'). If his soul so chooses, he can return to earth, the apex of the pyramid serving as a beacon.

When the Great Pyramid of Giza is complete, its base covers 13 acres and its summit rises to 481 feet (147 metres). Within a few decades, two of Khufu's successors, Khafre and Menkaure, will have left pyramids of their own a few hundred metres away, together with a massive reclining sphinx statue. The three Giza pyramids, their sides perfectly aligned to face north, south, east and west, will dwarf all others built before or after.

Like all the pharaohs, Khufu has been planning his 'house of eternity' since ascending the throne. As the intermediary between the gods and mortals, it is believed he will become Osiris, god of the dead upon dying.

And to expedite the passing of the pharaonic soul, the pyramid has been set within an expansive complex. Khufu's funeral will begin in a temple in the adjacent valley from where his body will be transported by priests to the pyramid along a causeway. There is a mortuary temple where his body is worshipped and three smaller pyramids for his queens. Meanwhile, noblemen will be buried in nearby mastaba (bench) tombs, the standard Egyptian tomb during the Early Dynastic period.

Upon his death, Khufu's great solar barge, 143 feet by 19 feet (43 metres by 5.7 metres), is buried in a deep pit for his use in the afterlife. Within the pyramid itself are ascending and descending passages, shafts for the possible purpose of ventilation and at least three chambers. Future

explorers will find a subterranean chamber, apparently never used.

Above this is a room, later to be misleadingly called the Queen's Chamber, which was likely used as a store for the pharaoh's funerary gifts. Highest of all is the King's Chamber, its roof supported by granite beams, each weighing 50 tons and designed to deflect the weight of the masonry above. Here, almost in the centre of the pyramid, the pharaoh's mummified corpse is placed within a granite sarcophagus. But sometime in the ensuing 45 centuries it will be lost, or even perhaps stolen by tomb raiders.

The god-king's legacy, the last surviving Wonder of the ancient world, survives. Of the god-king himself, there is nothing.



# Built by slaves?

**T**he popular image of the pyramid's construction involves immense lines of labourers dragging vast blocks along with a lash from the slave-driver's whip. The Flight from Egypt is described in the Old Testament's Book of Exodus. The Greek historian Herodotus visited Egypt around 450 BCE and surmised that the Giza pyramids were built by 100,000 slaves "who laboured constantly and were relieved every three months by a fresh gang." In 1888, British archaeologist Flinders Petrie, examining the Middle Kingdom pyramid at Lahun, found the remains of a labourers' town. Its encircling walls suggested the labourers were captives. Slavery did exist during the various dynasties. However the estimates of Herodotus are wrong: it is more likely that the Giza pyramids were built by around 5,000 primary workers (quarry workers, hauliers and masons) augmented by another 20,000 secondary workers (ramp builders, mortar mixtures, artists, cooks, wood suppliers). Egyptologist Mark Lehner, an associate of Harvard's Semitic Museum, did research during

the Nineties at Giza, and eventually discovered two settlements southeast of the Great Pyramid. One was laid out in an organic fashion, suggesting it grew over time. The other town was laid out in a grid fashion, bounded to the northwest by a great wall, known today as the 'wall of the crow.' The grave of a pyramid builder was inadvertently discovered by a tourist in 1990. A decade later, the nation's chief Egyptologist Zahi Hawass announced the discovery of labourers' remains in grave pits near the pyramid, which would have been an unlikely privilege for a slave. Although not mummified, the dozen skeletons were buried in foetal positions, heads pointing west and feet pointing east, in the traditional Egyptian fashion. These workers had bread and beer placed in the pits, offerings for the afterlife. Graffiti within the pyramids have been signed by crews such as the 'Friends of Khufu' or the 'Drunks of Menkaure,' pointing to a team ethic and the likelihood of specialised work groups. Lehner's research indicates the workers in both settlements were well fed. Animal remains reveal that they ate 21 cattle and 23 sheep per day, shipped to the site from outlying farms.

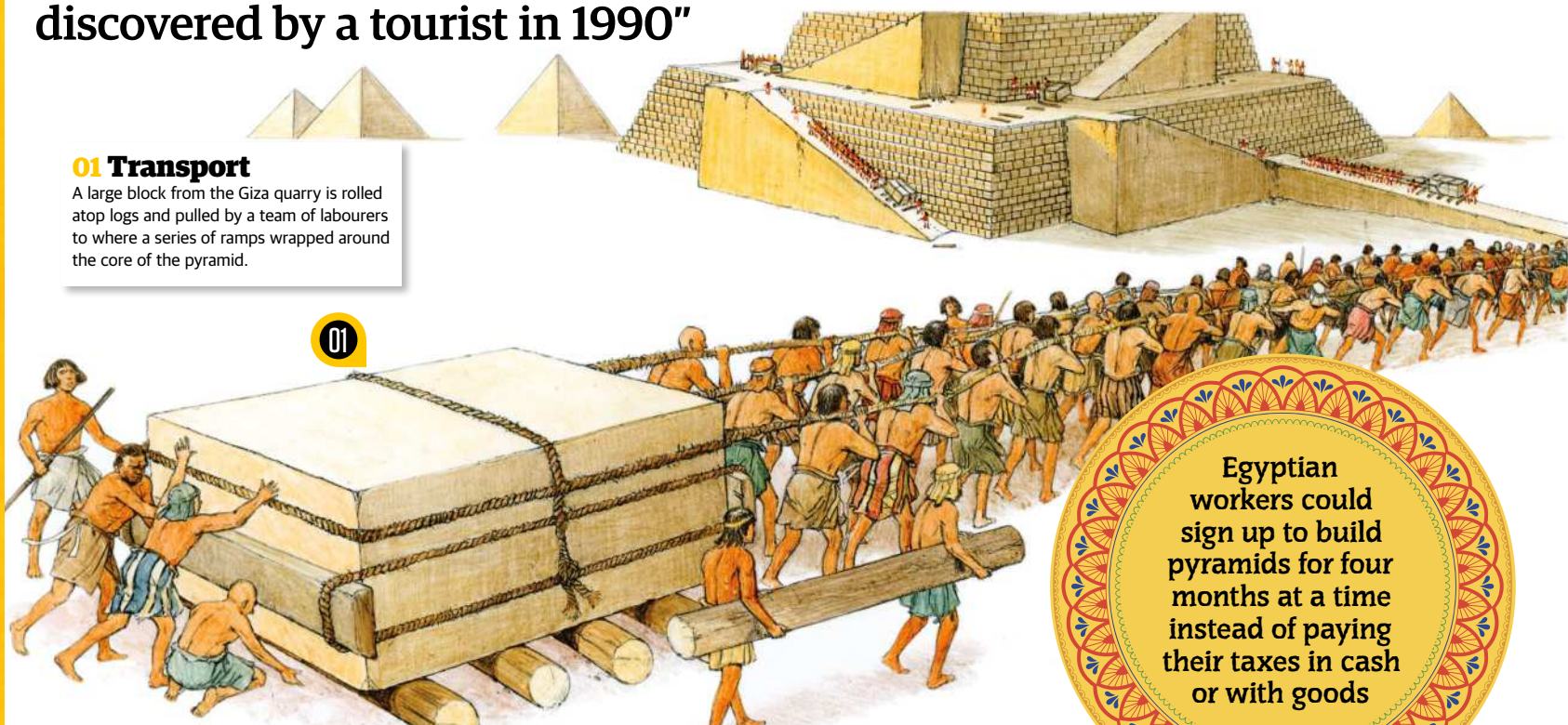
Although associated with Ancient Egypt, the very first pyramids were probably built in Ancient Mesopotamia



## "The grave of a pyramid builder was discovered by a tourist in 1990"

### 01 Transport

A large block from the Giza quarry is rolled atop logs and pulled by a team of labourers to where a series of ramps wrapped around the core of the pyramid.



Egyptian workers could sign up to build pyramids for four months at a time instead of paying their taxes in cash or with goods



Over the centuries, theories that the pyramids were built by slaves prevailed



## DAY IN THE LIFE OF A PYRAMID BUILDER



Workers with specialist skills lived nearby, while migrant labourers worked month-long shifts

### 06:00 am

The craftsman (stone carver) lives with family in a typical Egyptian house within a labourer's town. The house has a pillared public area, a domicile and a rear area for cooking. At dawn he rises and has a breakfast of figs, dates and bread with his family. Meanwhile, a migrant labourer rises in a simpler dwelling that he shares with other men.

### 07:00 am

The craftsman joins fellow workers and they head to the quarry. The pyramid has been under construction for over a decade, but the craftsmen consider its construction as part of their duty to the gods. They use stone and copper tools such as chisels and drills. At other times they will be carving passages within the pyramid itself.

### 10:00 am

The labourers are attempting to shift a 2.5 ton block from the quarry. Wooden containers in the shape of a quarter-circle are attached to each corner of the block so it can be rolled along like a barrel. At other times the blocks are dragged along using robes, and sled-wheels would be impeded by sand and gravel.

### 11:00 am - 1:00pm

In the mid-morning heat, the workers break and chat. The stone carver goes to an area of shade and maybe takes some wine from a pitcher. In the early afternoon, both the stone carver and labourer break for lunch. They eat bread and fish caught in the Nile.

### 16:00pm

When the labourers reach the building site, they must transport the blocks up ramps encircling the core of the pyramid. The men haul the blocks along the ramps by rope and lever them upwards. Huge amounts of gypsum and rubble are used to fill the gaps between the blocks.

### 19:00pm

The craftsman arrives home and he and his family have a meal of roasted beef or mutton with carrots and lentils. As darkness gathers, he has some beer and lights an oil lamp. If in the mood, he might play the board game senet with his children. As his family settles down for the night, the labourer is doing likewise, dreaming of the day his shift ends and he can return to his family village.



02

03

### 02 Limestone

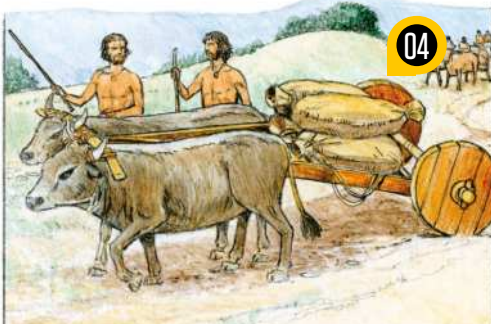
The Tura limestone used for the casings of the pyramids, which made them gleam white, is cut into blocks.

### 03 Water

Water is sourced from the Nile to lubricate the movement of wooden sleds over sand and gravel, or mixed with mud and baked to make bricks.

### 04 Oxen

Oxen are occasionally used in the transport of bricks from Giza and the nearby Fayoum depression.



04



## THE PYRAMIDS IN NUMBERS

The Great Pyramid was the world's tallest artificial structure for 3,800 years



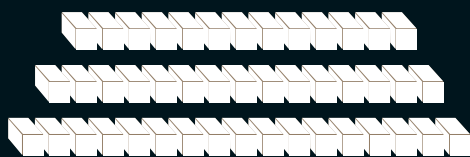
The pyramid had a workforce of around 30,000 people, rotated over time



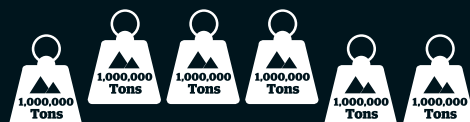
# 30,000



Around 45,000 cubic metres of stone were removed from the Aswan quarry



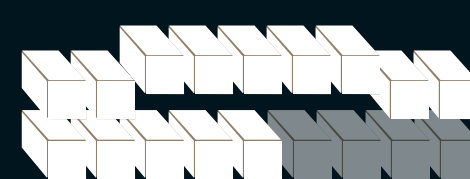
The Great Pyramid of Khufu weighs an estimated 5,955,000 tons



The workers' settlement had a population of approximately 15,000 people



The pyramid's outer casing had 144,000 polished stones\*



\*White blocks represent 10,000, transparent blocks represent 1,000 stones



The limestone quarries in Giza as they appear today



## Quarries, ramps & levers

The pyramids were preceded by tombs called mastabas (an Arabic word meaning 'bench'), which consisted of an underground burial chamber and overground chapel. These mastabas first seem to have appeared some time around 3500 BCE, during a time when mummification techniques were also in the process of being perfected.

By the Third Dynasty of the Old Kingdom, pharaoh Djoser had sufficient wealth to commission the first 'step' pyramid atop an existing mastaba. But it was under Khufu's father Snefru that the first true pyramids appeared. His earliest pyramid at Maydūm was originally a step pyramid, but it collapsed after attempts at modifications. Of his two later pyramids at Dashūr, structural faults left the Bent or Blunted Pyramid with its characteristic incline. Later, the Red Pyramid was successfully built as a true pyramid.

The lessons of Maydūm and Dashūr impressed upon Khufu's engineers the importance of getting the foundations right: the base of the Great Pyramid is level to two centimetres. To achieve this, the workers may have poured water into the excavated site and levelled everything above the waterline. They would then lower the water level, removing more material until the foundation was level.

The pyramids were made of limestone, granite, basalt, gypsum and baked mud bricks. In the case of the Giza pyramids, limestone blocks were quarried at Giza and probably a few other sites. The granite stones may have been brought up the Nile by barge from Aswan, and basalt was sourced in the nearby Fayoum depression.

The blocks would have been carved away using copper or stone tools. Transporting them

to the building site would have presented serious challenges and is a source of much speculation today. To move some of the larger blocks by barge, canals may have been dug. Most blocks were probably dragged overland on wooden sleds with ropes. Alternatively, blocks may have been placed atop wooden rollers or within circular containers to be rolled along like a beer keg.

When the blocks arrived at the site, there would have been several thousand workers there: some skilled craftsmen, some labourers, some locals and some from outlying provinces.

Getting the blocks up and into position involved building a series of ramps upon inclined planes of mud, brick and rubble. As the pyramid grew taller, the ramp had to be widened and extended or else it would collapse. Since the core of a true pyramid was essentially a step pyramid with packing blocks laid on top, the ramps would not have approached it at right angles; instead they ran from step to step.

American Egyptologist Mark Lehner speculates that a spiralling ramp may have begun in the stone quarry to the southeast and continued around the pyramid. The blocks were drawn into place on sleds that were lubricated by water or milk.

More recently, the French Egyptologist Jean Pierre Houdin has used 3D imaging to identify an anomalous spiral structure within Khufu's pyramid. Houdin proposes a theory based around an internal ramp: a regular external ramp was used for the first 30 per cent of the pyramid, then a spiralling internal ramp transported the blocks beyond that height.

Levering methods would have complemented the ramp structure. The blocks may have been lifted incrementally, using wooden wedges to gradually move the stones upwards. It would have been a tremendous feat.

Despite the substantial literacy of Ancient Egypt, no records exist of building plans or discussions of methods and materials



## An enduring mystery

**T**he end result was a structure that was symbolic on many levels. The pyramid's sloping limestone walls are representative of the descending rays of the sun, and its north pointing shaft points to the area of the night sky around which the stars rotate.

A modern visitor entering Khufu's pyramid does so through the so-called 'Robbers' Tunnel'. In 820, the Arab Al-Ma'mun led his men on a tomb raid. The men expected to find treasure, but Al-Ma'mun himself was intrigued by a legend that the pyramid contained a book of limitless historical knowledge.

To get inside, they used brute force. They used fire and battering rams to gain entry. Previously, in a fit of religious fanaticism, the sultan of Egypt, Al-Aziz Uthman (1171-1198), had attempted to demolish Khufu's pyramid. He failed, due to the scale of the monument, although damage was done to Menkaure's pyramid, and in many ways the pyramid remains impenetrable even today.

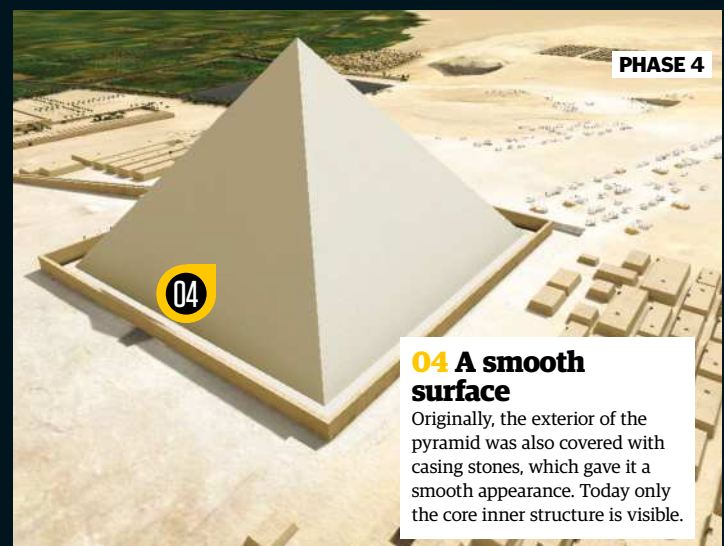
Despite valid theories and advanced imaging technologies, much about its construction and purpose will probably always be mysterious. However, built with mostly voluntary labour and

rudimentary technologies, apparently in tribute to a single human, it has far outlived the ancient civilisation that produced it. In four millennia from now, who can know whether the same will be said of today's great buildings?

**"The structure was symbolic on so many levels"**

## HOW TO BUILD A PYRAMID

One theory, posited by Jean-Pierre Houdin, suggests two ramps were used...





# Pyramids of a polymath

Once a man, then a god, the multi-talented Imhotep helped design the very first pyramid and rose to prominence as a legend of medicine and architecture

**I**mhotep is one of Ancient Egypt's most intriguing characters. Attributed with being one of the first physicians to step out of the shadow of antiquity, the low-born priest and scholar even helped a pharaoh design and construct the first true pyramid on Egyptian soil. Yet, after all those achievements in life, fate had a far more pivotal role for him in death. His accolades became legend, and in an age when gods walked on earth as kings, Imhotep was reborn a deity revered by and assimilated into many a culture.

He may have been immortalised on the silver screen in the 20th century as an occult priest with a thirst for vengeance and immortality, but the reality we can discern from the records of the earliest of the Egyptian eras reveals a very different man - someone upon whom immortality was thrust, long after his consent could actually have been obtained.

Records surrounding Imhotep's earliest years are patchy, but estimates place his date of birth in the vicinity of 2650 BCE. His father is said to have been a man named Kanofer, who was a celebrated architect; his mother is said to have a woman called Khreduonkh from the province of Mendes. The particulars of his childhood and his ascent into young manhood remain shrouded in even deeper layers of mystery, but it's clear that, at some point in the early years of King Djoser's reign, the young man was rising in prominence. A veritable polymath, Imhotep became famed for his intellect. He worked as a scribe and learned his trade as an engineer, two careers that would

do him well in the court of the pharaoh. He also turned his attention to medicine, and it was in this field that Imhotep forged just one of his many legacies.

The Edwin Smith Papyrus, so named after the dealer who purchased it in 1862, is purported to be based on the works and cases of Imhotep himself and describes in incredible detail the types of procedures performed on patients in the age of the Old Kingdom. The document itself, a rarity considering it depicts applicable medicine

rather than arcane treatments also attributed to the era, was written around 1700 BCE, but is likely based on medical practices performed a thousand years previous.

It describes around 48 procedures, ranging from the treatment of head traumas to tumours and spinal issues. Whether this document was truly based on Imhotep's own work or simply inspired by his legend isn't clear, but his medical genius was undisputed and would drive his later deification.

However, it should be said that Imhotep was not a man of pure science in a world that clung to magic and superstition. To the Ancient Egyptians, magic and science were one, and Imhotep is as likely to have studied and conducted practices as a sage as he would have as a physician. Imhotep was a radical thinker, but he was still a product of the time in which he lived.

Those early cinematic depictions of Imhotep as a maniacal holy man may have sent chills down the spines of audiences, but that fictional detail has roots in reality, too. Religion was a key part of

**Some followers initially confused Imhotep with the Thoth, the Egyptian god of archaeology, maths and healing**









## A KING'S SKYWARD AMBITIONS

As with Imhotep – the man with whom Djoser has become so closely associated – the Third-Dynasty king is a figure steeped in mystery. He is sometimes attributed with founding said dynasty, however, whether he actively established a distinction between the last kings of Egypt and himself or not, his desire to build new monuments and tributes contrasts the instability of the First and Second Dynasties.

Even Djoser's parentage remains shrouded in mystery. Queen Nimaethap is mentioned on a jar sealing relating to King Khasekhemwy, the last monarch of the Second Dynasty, so some historians have taken this to mean Nimaethap and Khasekhemwy are in fact Djoser's parents. A number of historians have also argued over the length of Djoser's reign, but most agree that he ruled for just under three decades. In that time, Djoser funded and commissioned the first pyramid ever built on Egyptian soil. A colossal undertaking at the time, the creation of the Step Pyramid at Sakkara suggests that Djoser's kingdom was not only substantially solvent at the time, but also relatively peaceful. Wars – both domestic and foreign – empty treasuries, so it's unlikely Djoser was engaged in any significant conflicts during his time as king.

Ancient Egyptian life – the actions, wisdom and favour of the gods permeated every facet of life, so it seemed appropriate that the inquisitive mind of Imhotep would find intellectual refuge in the church. He entered the church of Ra – the Sun god often linked with the local deity equivalent known as Atum – and quickly rose to the position of High Priest. The city of Memphis was the capital at the time, and the home of the pharaoh himself – it would have remained the seat of power in the Third Dynasty, but Heliopolis (the birthplace of the Church of Ra) would have likely been the religious epicentre of the country.

Whether it was due to his prowess as a scribe, a physician or a budding engineer, Imhotep eventually found himself rubbing shoulders with people from high places in King Djoser's court. The Third-Dynasty monarch was keen to memorialise the legacy of his royal house and reign long after his death. He wanted a necropolis that would last forever, and it soon became apparent Imhotep's technical mind was the perfect tool for the job.

Imhotep rose through the ranks of Djoser's court, eventually ascending to one of the very highest positions any man, commoner or noble could attain under the king: vizier. As vizier, Imhotep served as one of the king's most trusted advisors. He helped oversee huge swathes of office, from religious quandaries to matters of state, and had influence in areas such as the treasury, the maintenance of agriculture across the land and the Egyptian judicial system. It was a position of utmost power, and the king was quick to put every facet of Imhotep's intellect to good use.

Djoser then tasked Imhotep with designing a tomb fit for a monarch under the gods, a testament to his rule that would stand tall above all. Prior to

this, kings and queens had been buried in relatively simple structures known as mastabas, which were usually rectangular in shape and flat-roofed with sloping sides. Imhotep's answer would be radical: a step pyramid that soared to 62 metres in height and was constructed from stone and limestone. This type of pyramid differs from the those found in later dynasties due to the sharp angles of its design (the 'step' comes from the stacking of six mastabas, each one decreasing in size from bottom to top). On the scale Imhotep planned, it was revolutionary concept, and in execution, it was said to be unparalleled.

Forming part of Djoser's sweeping Necropolis complex, the king finally had a worthy tomb. When Djoser died, he was interred in the pyramid that Imhotep had overseen as architect. But what of Imhotep himself? After his incredible accolades in the court of Djoser, Imhotep continued in the service of the monarchs who followed and is believed to have died during the reign of King Huni, the last pharaoh of the Third Dynasty. As to what Imhotep did during the those final years, it seems history lost track of the polymath priest. His tomb has never been found and some historians have speculated that it's buried somewhere in Sakkara.



Statues and other depictions of Imhotep often show him seated and studying

### Defining moment Djoser becomes king 2670 BCE

Believed to have inherited the crown from Khasekhemwy or possibly Nebka – both of whom are associated with the Second Dynasty – King Djoser was one of the founders of the more prosperous age of the Old Kingdom. While he would go on to commission the impressive step pyramid at Sakkara (Saqqara), the monarch initially wanted to build a tomb at Abydos, but the project was ultimately left unfinished. King Djoser would go on to serve for just under three decades as king of Egypt.

### Defining moment Step Pyramid completed 2611 BCE

After years of planning and construction, the Step Pyramid and eventual tomb of King Djoser is finally finished. The pyramid itself was built by using ramps to shift the heavy stones into position, while tools such as large-scale rollers were employed to roll the stones into their proper places. The rough stone used to form the core was likely gathered from the Great Trench being dug around the pyramid. The inside of the pyramid is been designed to resemble the pharaoh's palace so that the afterlife will seem more familiar to him when he ascends.

## Timeline



2650 BCE

#### Imhotep is born

Historians and Egyptologists disagree on when Imhotep was born, but around 2650 is the most commonly agreed upon time frame. Ankhtow, a suburb of Memphis, is believed to be his birthplace.

2630 BCE

#### Joining Djoser's court

After some time making a name for himself in Memphis as a priest, a scribe, a healer and a physician, the multi-talented Imhotep joins the royal court of King Djoser.

2630 BCE

#### Work begins on step pyramid

As part of his grand vision for a sprawling necropolis at Sakkara, King Djoser commissions Imhotep to build a tomb worthy of an Egyptian king and reaches up to the heavens.



2600 BCE

#### The death of King Huni

The final (and oft contested) ruler of the Third Dynasty is believed to have died in or around the same year as Imhotep. While some texts refer to a funeral temple for Huni, Imhotep's final resting place remains a mystery.





Having achieved godly status, offerings from the sick were raised up to statues of Imhotep in hopes of healing

Such were his achievements in medicine, architecture, scripture and philosophy, it seemed that the mark of Imhotep would long outlive the man himself. Imhotep's long-standing association with King Djoser led to his name being inscribed on one of Djoser's statues, but his presence was far more palpable than a simple footnote in the history of a king.

Around a century after his death, Imhotep's reputation as an impeccable physician, sage and healer saw him reborn as a demigod of medicine. Two thousand years later, ideas of his saintly prominence gained momentum and he was fully deified. He was worshipped by various cults of Imhotep during the 26th and 27th Dynasties and followers would pay tribute at a temple that was built in his honour just outside Memphis.

Imhotep's deification was spurred on by the Persian conquest of Egypt in around 525 BCE, when the god Nefertem was replaced in the great Memphis triad of gods alongside Imhotep (as well as Ptah, the creator of the universe, and Sekhmet, the goddess of war and pestilence). Then, when the Greeks conquered Egypt in 332 BCE, Imhotep's symbolism

in healing and medicine became intertwined with the Greek equivalent, Asclepius. This increased his fame and cult following in the wake of the Ptolemaic era.

Imhotep's cult reached its zenith in Greco-Roman times, during which his temples in Philae, Memphis and along the Nile were often packed with those seeking healing at the hands of the god-physician. His influence even stretched as far as the Roman Empire; emperors Claudius and Tiberius both had inscriptions praising his medical prowess in their Egyptian temples.

But it wasn't just as a symbol of healing that Imhotep was glorified. His godly accolades were commonly confused and merged with that of Thoth (the god of writing and knowledge) and because of this, he grew to be venerated as a patron of the scribes. In fact, it is said that some scribes would pour a few drops of water in libation to Imhotep before creating a written record. In short, Imhotep's many talents followed him into an afterlife of fame, and his legacy ultimately transcended the actions of an ambitious everyman who simply dared to do more than had been done before.

No record of Imhotep's image remains but there is Ptolemaic-era statue attributed to him in The Louvre, Paris

The cut-stone construction is believed to have been the first of its large size



## THE PYRAMID AT SAKKARA

The choice to use regular stone for King Djoser's Step Pyramid was not revolutionary in itself, but using stone blocks to construct something as huge as a pyramid was unheard of. In order to hold the structure in place, Imhotep used fine limestone (an expensive commodity at the time) with packing in between. He incorporated the basic design of the traditional flat-roofed mastaba, but instead made each section a square rather than a rectangle. Each 'step' was constructed by building in accretion layers that leant inwards towards the core of the structure (rather than the flat, horizontal building technique used on mastabas) - this design choice was crucial, since the structure needed to be strong enough to hold itself in place without imploding. Imhotep added a passageway within the structure that led directly to the sarcophagus chamber, as well as a complicated network of tunnels and chambers. The pyramid itself was created as a means of holding and protecting the king's remains and treasures, but it also formed a vital part of a larger complex. A number of buildings, statues and pillars were constructed on site, all of which were surrounded by a stone wall that reached 10.7 metres (35 feet) high and was encased in limestone. The treasures of the king - 36,000 vessels filled with precious metals - were lowered from above into chambers beneath the surface. The chamber only had one opening, which was closed off with a 3.5 ton block.

## Defining moment

### Biographical papyrus written 200 CE

A papyrus originating from the Egyptian temple of Tebtunis is written. Transcribed in demotic script, it depicts a mixture of fantastical details and more realistic events from ancient history. For instance, it makes reference to Imhotep and his design of the Step Pyramid, as well as his close association with King Djoser. However, the story also mixes in Imhotep's deity-father Ptah, his purported biological mother Khereduankh and a little sister called Renpetneferet. It also, rather bizarrely, includes a battle between the Egyptians and the Assyrians, with Imhotep battling an Assyrian sorceress with magic.

2600 BCE

#### Imhotep passes away

Information surrounding the final years and ultimate death of Imhotep are sadly vague, but rumours persist that he built his own tomb and that it remains undiscovered to this day.

2500 BCE

#### Imhotep is made a demigod

Around a century after his supposed death, Imhotep's accolades in life lead to him being elevated in status to become a demigod of healing and medicine.



332 BC

#### Greek conquest of Greece

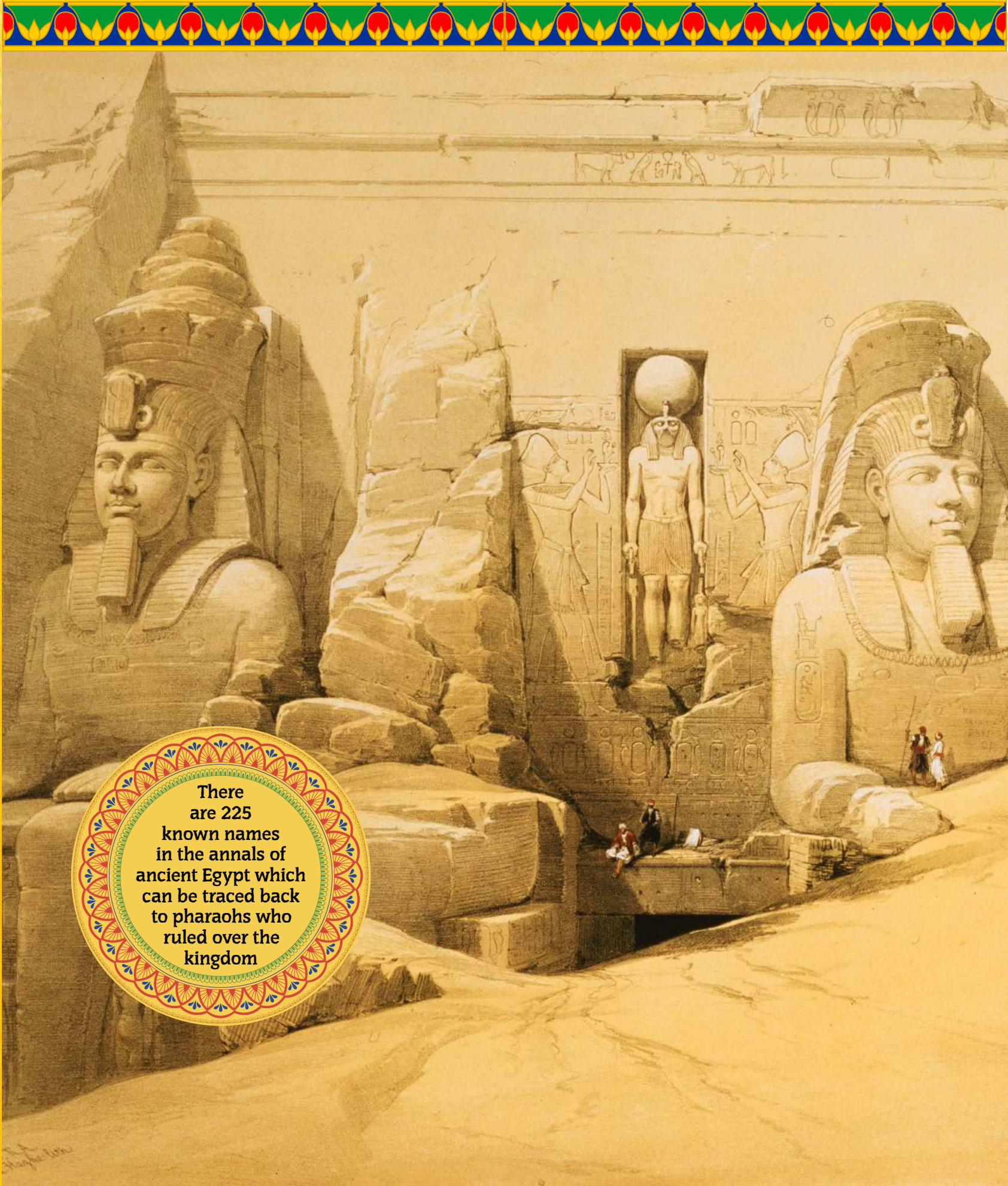
Around 200 years later, Macedonian-born conqueror Alexander the Great claims Egypt. The new Ptolemaic dynasties that followed also adopted Imhotep's image into their own cultures.

1862

#### Edwin Smith Papyrus discovered

The Edwin Smith Papyrus, rumoured to have been written based on the findings and practices of Imhotep, is purchased. It contains records of medical ailments of the time, as well as spells and incantations.





There  
are 225  
known names  
in the annals of  
ancient Egypt which  
can be traced back  
to pharaohs who  
ruled over the  
kingdom





# Power of the pharaoh

Over the course of more than 30 different dynasties, the rulers of ancient Egypt became both conquerors of the world and conduits of the gods

**A**ncient Egypt was a kingdom like no other. For 3,000 years a nation united as one, it expanded its horizons across the face of the Earth, erected true Wonders of the World and became one of the most powerful empires history has ever seen. Yet for all those achievements, none would have been possible without the rulers at its head – the kings, the queens and the pharaohs. Through the actions and decisions of over 170 men and women, Egypt became an epicentre for culture and philosophical thinking. It became a place of polytheism, where a pantheon of gods lived in (relative) harmony and informed every facet of daily life.

But who were these figureheads and what was their true role in everyday Egyptian society? How did a king or queen rule a kingdom that stretched from the Nile to the Euphrates? These questions have fascinated historians for centuries, and only now are we beginning to understand the responsibilities of a monarch in an age of deeply religious devotion and magical superstition.

The role of a pharaoh in Ancient Egypt is a complicated one, full of responsibilities and expectations, but it can be broadly defined by two distinct titles: 'The Lord of Two Lands' and 'High Priest of Every Temple'. Pharaohs were considered both divine figureheads and mortal rulers and as such were involved in everything from godly rituals to dispensing justice. As king, the pharaoh was also the conduit of *ma'at* (truth, justice, prosperity and cosmic harmony – the key tenets of Ancient Egyptian society), so his sovereignty embodied both temple and state.

While pharaohs were often worshipped with the same religious fervour reserved for the gods themselves (such devotion was common in both life and in death – for instance, Ptolemy II, the second ruler of the Greek Ptolemaic Dynasty, had

himself and his queen deified within two decades of their rule and welcomed the cults that formed around them), a pharaoh was still seen more as a divine conduit. They were viewed not as the equal of creationary gods such as Amun-Ra, but as a manifestation of their divinity.

In death, a pharaoh was just as influential as they were in life – the Egyptians viewed death not as the end of all things, but the immortalisation of the great and the just. Cults would worship a pharaoh long after their death, while their name and deeds would live on in the constellations named after them and the monumental tombs erected to protect their wealth and prestige. However, the importance of an individual pharaoh was often relative – cults were sometimes disbanded so as to avoid undermining the sanctity of the current regime, while countless tombs and cenotaphs were stripped of their stone and precious limestone in order to facilitate the monumental building of later rulers.

As a mortal man, the pharaoh was the most important individual on Earth; surrounded by servants and dignitaries, they would operate from opulent palaces and coordinate religious doctrine with the help of the most prevalent church at the time. Egyptian rulers often favoured a particular god and through these deities certain churches rose to significant power, much in the same way Catholic and Protestant churches benefited or suffered from a given religious skew in Medieval Europe. For instance, the god Amun became the patron god of the Theban kings for centuries, and his church became so powerful it caused one pharaoh (Akhenaten) to effectively outlaw it and establish another in its place.

A pharaoh would also coordinate the defence of the kingdom's borders while leading every military campaign personally. What could be more



## DJOSER

Founder of the Third Dynasty, Djoser was the first Egyptian monarch to commission a pyramid. He was also a long-time sponsor of Imhotep, arguably one of the most famous physicians and architects to emerge from the ancient world. Djoser inherited the throne from his father Khasekhemwy and ruled Egypt for around three decades. Like his father, Djoser was fond of architecture and construction, and soon set about adding his own monuments to the Egyptian landscape.

His most famous construction was the Pyramid of Djoser, a large necropolis consisting of statues, pillars and other decorations, all centred around a six-tiered step pyramid. Prior to this, pharaohs were usually buried in rectangular, flat-roofed tombs known as mastabas. Under the direction of polymath genius Imhotep, who rose to become Djoser's vizier and closest advisor, a total of six mastabas (in each one decreasing in size) were shaped into squares and stacked atop one another. The final monument was almost 21 metres (70 feet) tall, and was Egypt's first true pyramid.

Despite his fascination with construction, Djoser was still no layabout monarch when it came to foreign excursions. He conducted a number of campaigns, mostly in the Sinai Peninsula (located between the Mediterranean and Red Seas), where he mostly subdued outspoken subjects.

**"The Egyptians believed the dream world was where gods, men and demons walked the same path"**



A deeply religious and spiritual individual, only the king could envision something as grand as the pyramids

frightening to a rebellious state or neighbouring nation than a resplendent tool of the gods arriving to cast them aside? They would also oversee irrigation and the inundation of the Nile River, ensuring the fertile land along this body of water was fresh for agriculture.

The king would even commission the building of new temples and the renovation of existing monuments, with some rulers even destroying the work of their predecessors. Ancient Egypt was a kingdom that embodied the personality of its ruler at that time. For instance, Amenhotep III wanted to usher in a new golden age during the 18th Dynasty and spent a great deal of his reign beautifying the land. Splendid statues and temples were built, while an influx of wealth from military successes across the border had enabled him to adorn his palace and the Egyptian capital of Thebes with gold and expensive cloth.

The daily life of a pharaoh would differ slightly between the dynasties, but overall his (or her) duties would remain the same. Pharaohs would often waken in a specially designed sleeping chamber - the Ancient Egyptians were a people deeply in touch with their faith, a spectrum of dogma, science, magic and superstition. Just because a pharaoh was the divine manifestation of godly will on Earth didn't mean he was free from worry or concern. The Egyptians believed the dream world was a place where gods, men and demons walked the same path, so a pharaoh's sacrosanct sleeping quarters would be adorned with spells and incantations, and perhaps statues or busts of Bes (the god of repelling evil) or Nechbet (a goddess of protection) adorning their bedroom walls and columns.

The pharaoh would then move into the nearby Chamber of Cleansing, where he would stand

## Influential figure

**Narmer**

**31st century BCE**

Less well known than some of the more outlandish and well-documented kings, Narmer still remains one of the most influential men to ever rule over Egypt. He was the first king to unite all of Egypt, effectively ending the Predynastic Era, and founded the first dynasty. Evidence suggests Egypt also had an economic presence in Canaan (home of the future invaders, the Hyksos). Some historians argue the first king was a man called Menes, while others reckon the two are one and the same.



## Influential figure

**Khufu**

**2589-2566 BCE**

A Fourth-Dynasty pharaoh who ruled during the first half of the Old Kingdom era, Khufu (originally Khnum-Khufu) is widely accepted as the king who commissioned the Great Pyramid of Giza, one of the Seven Wonders of the World. He was the son of Sneferu and Queen Hetepheres I and is believed to have had three wives. Very little is known about his reign, and the only surviving statue of him (found in a temple ruin in Abydos in 1903) is one of the smallest ever found.



**Merneith**

c. 2970 BCE

**Huni**

c. 2600 BCE

31st century BCE

**Hor-Aha**

Considered the second pharaoh of the very first Egyptian dynasty, Hor-Aha inherited the throne from the man who unified Predynastic Egypt, Narmer. He conducted campaigns against the Nubians.

c. 2690 BCE

**Khasekhemwy**

The father of Djoser (who would go on to build the first pyramid), Khasekhemwy was the archetypal leader for his son to follow, conducting military campaigns and building monuments.

c. 2670 BCE

**Djoser**

Djoser, founder of the third Egyptian dynasty, is most famous for his step pyramid (the first to be built on Egyptian soil) and his close relationship with multi-talented architect-priest, Imhotep.

c. 2575 BCE

**Djedefre**

The son and immediate successor of Khufu, Djedefre is known for building one of the most impressive and enduring Egyptian monuments, Great Pyramid of Giza.

c. 2570 BCE

**Khafre**

Djedefre's successor, Khafre (or Khafra) built the second largest pyramid at Giza. He's also linked to the creation of the Great Sphinx, but his involvement remains hotly contested.

c. 2530 BCE

**Menkaure**

The son of Khafra and grandson of Khufu, Menkaure built a famous monument at Giza, the Pyramid of Menkaure and a number of temples.



## SYMBOLS OF A PHARAOH

Exuding wealth and power was a key part of pharaonic propaganda. Here are just a few of the items that did the job for them



### Nemes headdress

Less of a crown and more of symbol of a pharaoh's power, the nemes was a headdress that covered the whole crown, the back of the head and the nape of the neck. Usually striped with gold (to represent the ruler's wealth), the nemes had two large flaps that hung behind the ears and draped over the front of the shoulders.

### Crook and flail

Originally linked solely to the god Osiris, the crook and flail later became a combined symbol of pharaonic authority. The shepherd's crook stood for the power and responsibility of kingship, while the flail was shorthand for the fertility of the land.



### Ankh

The ankh, which is usually grasped in the left hand of a pharaoh, is one of the most important symbols associated with the pharaohs. It represents the concept of eternal life, a state of being that was close to the hearts of the pharaohs, as represented by their tombs and monuments. The ankh also represents religious pluralism (all gods as one).

2492-2487 BCE

#### Userkaf

He built a pyramid at the mortuary complex at Sakkara, as well as beginning the tradition of constructing sun temples at Abusir.

2112-2063 BCE

#### Intef II

The third ruler of the 11th Dynasty, Intef II ruled Upper Egypt for the best part of 50 years. He united most of the southern families together to strengthen the south of the country as one.

2063-2055 BCE

#### Intef III

Ruled during the First Intermediate Period as part of the 11th Dynasty. Despite inheriting a mostly peaceful Upper Egypt, Intef III was still actively busy with military campaigns in a hope to reunite the nation.

2055-2010 BCE

#### Mentuhotep II

As part of the 11th Dynasty, Mentuhotep II ruled for just over half a century. He is credited as the man who reunited Egypt, thus ending the tumultuous First Intermediate Period.

1878-1839 BCE

#### Senusret III

The fifth known monarch of the 12th Dynasty, Senusret ruled during the most prosperous period of the Middle Kingdom. He conducted vast military campaigns that brought stability to the region and built the Canal of the Pharaohs.

1860-1814 BCE

#### Amenemhat III

A pharaoh of the 12th Egyptian dynasty, Amenemhat III's reign is considered the golden age of the Middle Kingdom era. He erected pyramids and continued work on the Great Canal.



## THUTMOSE III

Emerging from the shadow of arguably the most ambitious and powerful woman to ever assume the Egyptian throne, Thutmose III went from a co-regent to the head of one of the most powerful empires in the ancient world. As was tradition in the 18th Dynasty, Thutmose spent the first 22 years of his reign co-ruling with his aunt and stepmother Hatshepsut. When his father Thutmose II died, the prince was too young to inherit the throne, so his aunt assumed his royal responsibilities. She would go on to reject the title of regent and assume the title of queen – however, Hatshepsut never denied her nephew's kinship and legitimacy, so the two ruled peacefully together as he grew into a man.

When he inherited the throne in 1479 BCE, Thutmose III began a rule defined by the activity of his military. He conducted a total of 17 campaigns, and his expansionist nature led to him being described as 'the Napoleon of Egypt' by some historians. He possessed a tactical genius that enabled him to expand Egypt's borders with fervour and re-establish Egypt as one of the most powerful empires that ever existed. As well as his conquest of Syria, Thutmose III built a huge number of monuments and put a great deal of focus on adding to the temple at Karnak.



## "The visiting of temples was a vital part of a pharaoh's roving duties – known more commonly as 'doing the praises'"

behind a low stone wall to protect his royal modesty as a group of servants washed his body with warm and cold water. After being dried with linen towels, the pharaoh would move into the Robing Room. Here, the Chief of Secrets of the House of the Morning (a man tasked with overseeing the monarch's garments for every occasion) would coordinate the careful clothing of the king by another crew of servants.

Since we only have stone pictorials or statues to present the image of the king, it's easy to assume the Egyptian monarch wore a ceremonial headdress and carried an ankh and cane or flail wherever he went, but this is far from the reality. Of course, for official ceremonies, such as the meeting of dignitaries of public addresses, the king would wear all the paraphernalia, but this was far from the case when it came to the laborious, day-to-day running of a kingdom.

The handlers of royal linen, the handlers of the royal crowns and headdresses, and even the director of royal loincloths would all gather

around the king and dress him for the day to come. Instead of the opulent gowns and sashes of formal wear, the king would have been dressed in a similar fashion to his courtiers – a simple linen tunic, sandals and a sash around the waist. He wouldn't have worn the heavy ceremonial crowns commonly seen on statues; instead he would have worn a simple diadem most likely made of silver and gold with a uraeus (a coiling cobra) at the front.

From there, the pharaoh would proceed to the temple adjoining the palace. He would pray to the gods and pay tribute alone before moving to the throne room to conduct the first meetings of the day. The king would meet with his advisors and dignitaries from across the land every day, receiving reports from across the kingdom and ordering his officials to oversee certain aspects that require further attention.

Of course, while any citizen could petition for an audience with the king, not everyone made it to the throne room. Even those who did may well have only met with the vizier instead. The pharaoh would pass laws into effect, but it seems most likely that many of these were ratified by

**The pharaoh would rise at dawn to meet the sun, then he would don his cosmetics, jewellery and perfume after bathing**

## Influential figure

### Ahmose I 1539-1514 BCE

Founder of the 18th Dynasty and one of the most influential pharaohs, Ahmose I successfully united his kingdom after more than a hundred years of division. The Hyksos, a Semitic warrior tribe, had settled in the Delta and used advanced weaponry such as compound bows and chariots. By sheer force of will, Ahmose I defeated the Hyksos and drove them out of Egypt. His military successes would infuse the nation with wealth and a new monument-building program rejuvenated the face of the kingdom.



## Influential figure

### Hatshepsut 1473-1458 BCE

Hatshepsut ('Foremost of Noble Ladies') was the fifth pharaoh of the 18th Dynasty. She remains the longest-serving female pharaoh and arguably the most successful. She was the Chief Wife of Thutmose II and, upon his death, she became regent for his son Thutmose III. In an unprecedented move, she installed herself as queen in 1473 BCE, but did so without denying her own stepson's legitimacy. As such, when Thutmose III came of age, he and his aunt/stepmother co-ruled until her death in 1458 BCE.

1806-1802 BCE

#### Sobekneferu

A female ruler who ruled Egypt for around four years during the 12th Dynasty, Sobekneferu inherited the throne when her predecessor Amenemhat IV died without a son.

1764-1759 BCE

#### Khendjer

The 21st pharaoh of the 13th Dynasty, Khendjer built a small pyramid for himself in the mortuary complex at Sakkarā. He's the earliest known Semitic king of Egypt.

1701-1677 BCE

#### Merneferre

An ancient Egyptian pharaoh of the mid-13th Dynasty, he reigned over Upper and Middle Egypt concurrently with the pharaohs of the 14th Dynasty.

1610-1580 BCE

#### Khyan

1560-1557 BCE

#### Sequenre Tao

c. 1540 BCE

#### Khamudi

Khamudi was the last ruler of the Hyksos, otherwise known as the 15th Dynasty. He and his people were driven from Egypt by the Theban pharaoh Ahmose I.

1506-1493 BCE

#### Thutmose I

The third pharaoh of the 18th Dynasty, Thutmose I (or Tuthmosis) ruled during the prosperous era known as the New Kingdom. He conducted many military campaigns and expanded the boundaries of the kingdom further than any other previous monarch.



his closest advisors so as not to drown the king in administrative duties.

The pharaoh was the arbiter of his people and as such was always on the move. The Egyptians endured in the harsh environment of Northern Africa not just because of their ability to adapt and survive, but because of the ferocious activity of their rulers. Simply sitting in state in the nation's capital would have been disastrous, so a successful pharaoh would visit every corner of his kingdom, inspecting the building of temples and overseeing the construction of new fortifications to protect the borders of his kingdom. The visiting of temples was a vital part of a pharaoh's roving duties - known more commonly as 'doing the praises', it was an awe-inspiring mark of respect to see the pharaoh and his court visit a temple and offer tribute to a local god.

Festivals were another important part of Egyptian culture, especially those that celebrated the sanctity of the pharaoh's rule. The Opet festival, usually held at the Luxor Temple, would represent the renewal of the royal ka, or soul (the very life force of Egyptian society) and by association the power of the king himself. The Sed festival, usually held in a king's 30th year to celebrate their continued rule, was another huge occasion that would see the entire kingdom decked out in its finest decorations. In short, these festivals were a testament to the love and reverence the Egyptian people had for their ruler.

Yet, for all their influence and divine status, one man could not be in all places at all times. As such, a pharaoh would often deputise his priests, tasking them with travelling to different corners of the kingdom to oversee new and existing temples. He would often pass a great deal of responsibility

Ahmose I is depicted expelling the Hyksos invaders from Egypt



## AKHENATEN (AMENHOTEP IV)

Few pharaohs made an impact on ancient Egypt quite as severely as the 18th Dynasty king Akhenaten. He didn't change the nation by his military campaigns or his desire to erect great and imposing monuments - his mark on history used the most powerful tool available: religion. For time immemorial, Egypt had celebrated and worshipped a host of different gods, each one representing the different facets of life, industry and human nature itself. The rise of Theban pharaohs and their prosperity in the 18th Dynasty had elevated the god Amun to patron status.

The Church of Amun had grown in power, too, and its gradual influence over the court of his father, Amenhotep III, had soured the prince as a child. When he ascended to the throne in 1351 BCE, Amenhotep IV dismantled the church that had irked him so much as a young man. He banned polytheistic practices (worship of multiple gods) across the nation and forced his people, priests and family to worship one single god: Aten. He even moved the capital from Memphis to Akhetaton, but ultimately his attempts to undo the theological fabric of his country failed and his Amarna Period was buried by future monarchs trying to erase his legacy.

## Influential figure

### Amenhotep III 1391-1353 BCE

Otherwise known as Amenhotep III the Magnificent, Amenhotep III was ninth pharaoh of the 18th Dynasty. Under his stewardship, Egypt saw a renaissance in its arts and culture; he redecorated the kingdom with monuments; vessels, statues and temples were erected. Egypt rose to a new era of cultural awakening. Amenhotep III inherited a relatively peaceful kingdom, so he was able to focus most of his attention on beautifying the kingdom. Over 250 statues bearing his name have been discovered, proving him to be one of the most prolific builders of the era.

## Influential figure

### Ramesses II 1279-1213 BCE

One of the most famous and recognisable pharaohs (perhaps second only to Tutankhamun), Ramesses II is celebrated as the most successful and powerful of the Egyptian kings. He led a large number of military campaigns to the north and south of the country, vastly increasing the size of the kingdom as he conquered new lands. He reigned for 66 years and celebrated an unprecedented 14 Sed festivals. He was also a prolific builder, his monuments including the city of Pi-Ramesses.



1479-1425 BCE

#### Thutmose III

The sixth pharaoh of the 18th Dynasty, Thutmose began his reign in a co-regency with his aunt and stepmother Hatshepsut. As a sole ruler, he helped to expand the nation's territory like never before.

1401-1391 BCE

#### Thutmose IV

The eighth pharaoh of the 18th Dynasty, Thutmose IV erected the tallest ever obelisk at the Temple at Karnak. He was buried in the Valley of the Kings.

1353-1336 BCE

#### Akhenaten

One of the most controversial kings of Egypt, Akhenaten (formerly Amenhotep IV) rejected the polytheism that had defined the nation since its inception and enforced the worship of a singular god, Aten.

1332-1323 BCE

#### Tutankhamun

Arguably the most famous pharaoh of all, King Tut was the son of the heretic king Akhenaten. He helped reverse much of his father's actions and returned Egypt to its traditional polytheistic religious structure.

1290-1279 BCE

#### Seti I

He was a pharaoh of the 19th Dynasty, which held power over Egypt during the New Kingdom era. He was the father of Ramesses II.





## THE LIVES OF EGYPTIAN QUEENS

With the exception of queens such as Cleopatra and Hatshepsut, who took the most powerful seat for themselves through guile and sheer will, the queens of Ancient Egypt experienced very different worlds.

The royal women of the Old and Middle Kingdoms were required to be passive, and expected to provide male heirs without refrain or complications. However, with these subservient requirements came a deceptive amount of hidden power. Should a queen hold the favour of her king, he might leave the running of the kingdom in her stead while he left the kingdom to conduct military campaigns or focus on monument construction. She would also oversee the running of the palace and ultimately act as regent should the king die before a male heir was of age to inherit the throne independently.

By contrast, the life of a queen in the New Kingdom era was far different. Royal women were afforded far more authority and prestige. The more astute and popular queens were able to acquire their own secular and religious titles, such as God's Wife of Amun, and receive with it the land, servants and followers such a potent station could offer.



Relief depicting the coronation of a pharaoh

### Influential figure

**Merneptah**  
1213-1203 BCE

The fourth ruler of the 19th Dynasty, Merneptah was the 13th son of Ramesses II and only came to power because all of his older brothers predeceased him - he was over 60. He's famed for his military campaigns, including defending Egypt from a combined force of Sea Peoples and Libyans. He also moved the capital from Pi-Ramesses back to Memphis, where he built a large palace next to the temple of Ptah.



### Influential figure

**Ramesses III**  
1186-1155 BCE

The second pharaoh of the 20th Dynasty, he is considered the last great king to hold any substantial authority in the prosperous New Kingdom era. Ramesses III is celebrated for maintaining stability in the kingdom while it began to suffer both economic strife and a constant threat of foreign invasions. The Sea Peoples (a large group of seafaring raiders) were constantly attempting to invade and eventually settled in Canaan. Ramesses III is believed to have claimed he defeated the Sea Peoples and granted them the land as an act of kindness, but it seems likely he was instead unable to halt their occupation.



1047-1001 BCE

#### Psusennes I

The third king of the 21st Egyptian dynasty, Psusennes I was most famous for the discovery of his intact tomb in 1940. He reigned for just over 40 years.

943-922 BCE

#### Shoshenq I

Most famous for suspending traditional hereditary succession in favour of a system where the most powerful men selected a new ruler. This practice lasted for around a century.

690-664 BCE

#### Taharqa

A pharaoh of the 25th Dynasty, Taharqa spent most of his campaign in conflict with the Assyrians. He's also known for his impressive additions to the Temple at Karnak.

672-664 BCE

#### Necho I

610-595 BCE

#### Necho II

Conducted a number of military campaigns across Asia, but is most famous for a surprise defeat to the Babylonians who subsequently drove all Egyptian influence from Syria.

570-526 BCE

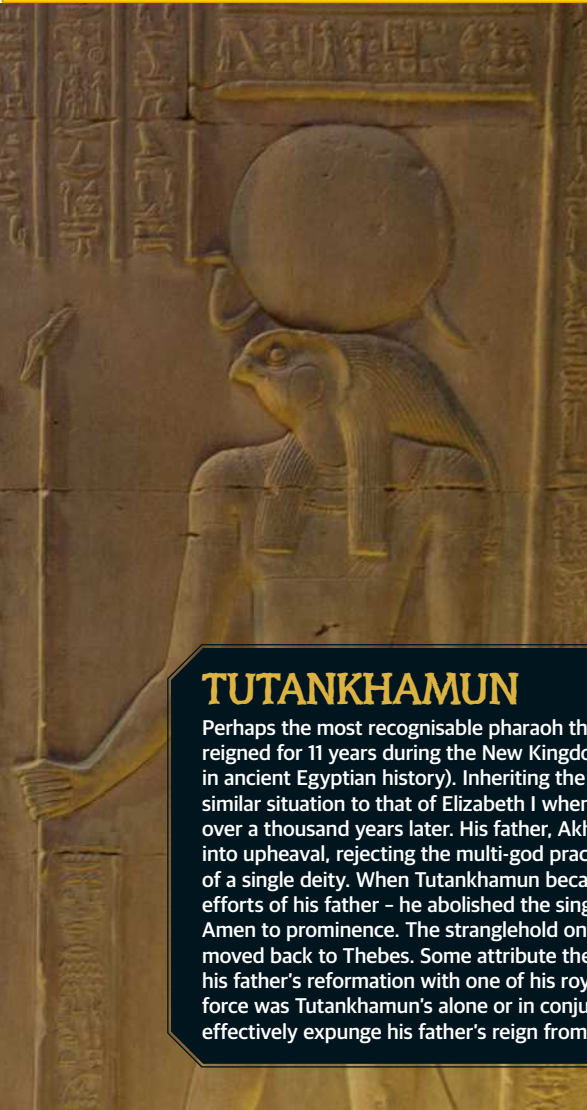
#### Amasis II

525-522 BCE

#### Cambyses II

A warrior king of Persia, Cambyses invaded Egypt in 525 BCE and founded the First Persian Occupation. Defeated Psamtik III to take the throne.





## TUTANKHAMUN

Perhaps the most recognisable pharaoh that ever lived, King Tut (as he's colloquially known) reigned for 11 years during the New Kingdom (a period of time considered the second golden age in ancient Egyptian history). Inheriting the throne at the age of nine or ten, Tutankhamun faced a similar situation to that of Elizabeth I when she assumed the English throne from her sister Mary I over a thousand years later. His father, Akhenaten (formerly Amenhotep IV), had sent the nation into upheaval, rejecting the multi-god practices that had defined Egypt since its inception in favour of a single deity. When Tutankhamun became pharaoh in 1333 BCE he started dismantling the efforts of his father - he abolished the single worship of the god Aten and re-elevated the god Amen to prominence. The stranglehold on the priesthood of Amen was lifted and the capital was moved back to Thebes. Some attribute the almost overzealous manner in which King Tut reversed his father's reformation with one of his royal advisors/viziers, Horemheb, but whether the driving force was Tutankhamun's alone or in conjunction with his court, he still made every effort to effectively expunge his father's reign from history.

onto members of the royal family, most notably the Great Royal Wife. A pharaoh would likely take multiple wives, but only one would be his true queen, who would hold the most power outside of her husband. While the lesser wives (who would range from foreign princesses to a pharaoh's own sisters and daughters) would often remain at one of the king's many palaces around the country, the Great Royal Wife would usually travel with the king as he conducted his duties.

Queens formed an important part of a pharaoh's persona. As the mother of princes, a queen could inspire cults and followings in her own right, and many of the most influential kings were immortalised in pictorials and statues with their favourite consort at their side. When a pharaoh was busy elsewhere - usually with overseeing the construction of a tomb or standing at the head of a foreign campaign - the running of the country was often left to his queen. Some queens, such

as Queen Tiye (the wife of Amenhotep III), were elevated to such a high position of power that they hosted foreign dignitaries and entertained kings with all the authority of their husband. Of course, not all queens could boast such influence, but those most favoured were still a formidable presence and influence in the royal court.

The hierarchy of the royal court, and Egyptian society as a whole, was often based upon an individual's importance and contributions. Directly under the pharaoh stood the queen, but in cases where the Great Royal Wife was not as elevated, a grand vizier would advise the king on matters of state. Beneath the vizier and advisors were the priests and nobility of the royal court. These were the elite and were usually heads of the most powerful families of the period. Beneath the nobility and the holy men were physicians, sages and engineers, followed by scribes, merchants and artists. Finally, at the bottom of the hierarchical pyramid were the vast majority of the population - the everyday working people themselves.

From their inception with King Narmer and the First Dynasty, to their conclusion with the suicide of Cleopatra VII and Egypt's absorption into the Roman Empire, the pharaohs were the epitome of royal power in the ancient world. They commanded armies that conquered even the most bloodthirsty of enemies, orchestrated the construction of vast and impressive monuments that have survived to this day, and maintained over 30 dynasties that shaped the world around its majesty.

The pharaohs may now have been consigned to Ancient Egyptian history, but their mark upon that history will last forever.

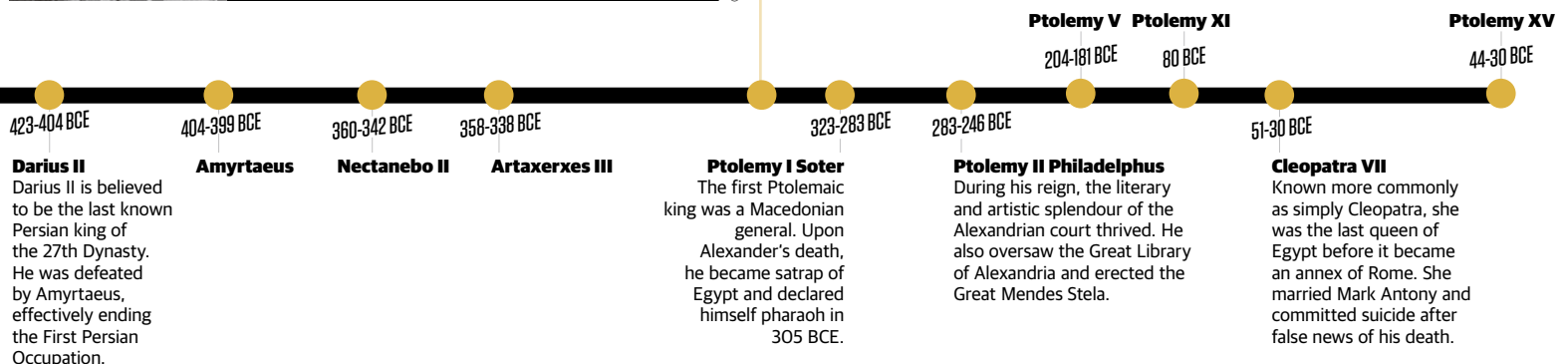
## Influential figure Alexander the Great 332-323 BCE

One of the most famous and dominant rulers of the ancient world, Alexander the Great of Macedonia eventually turned his attention to the land of the pharaohs and conquered it in 332 BCE. While in a constant state of military activity, Alexander still installed himself as pharaoh for almost a decade. Egypt was floundering under Persian rule at the time of his conquest and his arrival was seen as something of a liberation. He oversaw the integration of Greek culture into Egypt and even created Alexandria, which became the capital for the Ptolemaic kingdom that would follow.



Statues of pharaohs in the Temple of Ramesses II, Luxor

© Alamy





# Pharaohs of Egypt

Pharaohs ruled of one of the mightiest kingdoms of the ancient world – how did they gain, hold, and occasionally lose, their thrones?

**T**he civilisation of Egypt stands alongside the other river valley societies as one of the oldest on Earth. Yet while the Indus Valley civilisation collapsed and Mesopotamia underwent radical changes, the kingdom of Egypt survived in many ways unchanged for millennia. One of the reasons for Egypt's perceived stability was its tradition of strong centralised leadership embodied in the person of their kings – the pharaohs.

Though it is now common to name all kings of Ancient Egypt as pharaohs, the title itself was not claimed by an Egyptian ruler until -1300 BCE, by which point the kingdom of Egypt was already 2,000 years old. The word pharaoh derives from the Egyptian word 'pero', meaning

'Great House'. While this was literally the palace of the king, it came to be a title associated with the person currently occupying it.

The kings of Egypt were not just temporal kings. Like many ancient rulers they were closely tied to the gods. They were "High priests to every temple" and so acted as intermediaries between the human and divine worlds. They were also divinities in their own right. The moment a pharaoh came to the throne he took up the symbolic crook and flail associated with Osiris, and his reign was joined with that of the god Horus.

Over the course of millennia the people who occupied the throne of Egypt varied greatly in their powers and abilities. The men, and women, who ruled Egypt were responsible for the creation of laws, defending and expanding their empire, and managing the resources of one of the richest lands in antiquity. Beyond these earthly duties one of the most important was the maintenance of Ma'at – the cosmic sense of balance and order. Those who failed could see their reigns abruptly brought to an end. Who were these extraordinary people who straddled the mundane world and the divine?

**"The kings of Egypt were not just temporal kings...they were closely tied to the gods"**

## History of the Pharaohs

### Defining moment

#### The first king of Egypt 3100 BCE

Narmer is generally considered to be the first king of Egypt. Coming to the throne of Upper Egypt, Narmer conquered the independent realm of Lower Egypt and brought the whole of Egypt under his rule. From warlike images such as the Narmer Palette it seems that it was not a peaceful takeover. Narmer also projected Egyptian power outside of Egypt and into the land of Canaan where inscriptions naming him have been found. For the next 3000 years a unified Egypt was the goal of all who followed Narmer on the throne.



Images: Wiki - Heegy1

### Defining moment

#### Hyksos invaders 1700 BCE

The Hyksos were the first non-Egyptian people to rule large portions of Egypt. While Egyptians record them as violent invaders from outside, archaeological evidence points to them as peaceful settlers who slowly accrued power. Declaring themselves a separate kingdom the Hyksos used complex chariots and improved bow designs to defeat the Egyptians in battle. The native Egyptian pharaohs were driven to a small area around Thebes. Eventually under Pharaoh Ahmose I the Hyksos were expelled from Egypt. No one knows exactly where the Hyksos came from nor where they went.



Images: Wiki - Heegy1

2650 BCE

#### Djoser's tomb

Pharaohs' tombs had always been grand but Djoser's set a new standard for pharaohs to follow. By building a series of square platforms one atop another Djoser's tomb formed the first pyramid. Many more were to follow.

2560 BCE

#### The Great Pyramid

Less than a century after the first pyramid was built, Pharaoh Khufu had the largest pyramid in Egyptian history constructed at Giza. Standing 150m tall and covered in gleaming limestone it was one of the wonders of the ancient world.

2160 BCE

#### Battling nomarchs

Egypt's kings ruled through vassals known as nomarchs. When the nomarchs became too powerful they could threaten the throne. Meryibre Khety rebelled against the pharaoh and founded the 9th Dynasty.

1480 BCE

#### A female pharaoh

Wives and mothers of pharaohs often acted as regents during the minority of young pharaohs but several proclaimed themselves 'King'. Hatshepsut adopted traditionally male imagery to underline her right to rule.

1350 BCE

#### The first monotheist

The Egyptian religion was polytheistic, with many gods controlling the universe. Pharaoh Akhenaten replaced them all with the worship of the sun's disc, the Aten, with himself as sole intermediary. His new religion did not last.





The pharaohs who ruled Egypt embodied both royal and divine power as kings and gods

The mysterious Sea Peoples who attacked Egypt were made up of at least nine different peoples, including Achaean Greeks

## Influential figure Alexander the Great 332 BCE

Alexander of Macedon created the largest empire the world had then seen, and one of his first conquests was of Egypt. While Cambyses of Persia had attempted to co-opt Egyptian religion to placate his new subjects, Persian rulers remained deeply unpopular. Alexander adopted Egyptian styles and was crowned pharaoh, while allowing Egyptians to rule themselves – so long as they paid taxes to him. He ordered the construction of a new city at the mouth of the Nile, called Alexandria, that was to become one of the great cities of the ancient world.



1279 BCE

### Ramesses II and greatest

Reigning for decades over a prosperous Egypt, Ramesses II was able to build great monuments, war successfully with his neighbours, and defeat an invasion by a mysterious group known only as the Sea Peoples.

744 BCE

### A Kushite kingdom

Increasingly rebellious governors and priests weakened Egypt. The Kushite Kingdom to the south took advantage of this to conquer the whole of Egypt. Oddly this led to a renaissance in Ancient Egyptian art as the Kushites copied aspects of it.

525 BCE

### Under the Persians

The kings of the Achaemenid Empire conquered Egypt and had themselves crowned as pharaohs. When native Egyptians attempted to rebel they were swiftly crushed. The flow of gold and corn into Persia was deeply unpopular in Egypt.

30 BCE

### Cleopatra the last

A descendant of one of Alexander's generals, Cleopatra VII was the last independent ruler of Egypt. Siding with the losing side in Rome's civil war she was stripped of her royal powers and committed suicide – ending over 3000 years of Egyptian kingship.



# The first dynasties

5000 years ago a unified Egyptian kingdom emerged for the first time under kings who sought ever after to hold it all together



This palette depicts the first pharaoh, Narmer, bloodily conquering his enemies to unite Upper and Lower Egypt under his rule

**T**he Nile must once have seemed like a paradisaical gift in the ancient world. Running in a narrow valley through dry and inhospitable lands it offered a chance to live, farm, and hunt to those who called it home. With the creation of irrigation networks as early as the 6th millennium BCE, the land under cultivation began to expand. Settlements developed that would lead to the creation of the ancient Egyptian kingdom.

Egypt in the 4th millennium BCE was divided into two lands, however. Upper Egypt, the southern portion, was known as the 'Land of Reeds' while Lower Egypt was simply 'The North'. We know little of the rulers of these independent realms. Archaeologists have found the symbols of kings who are named for these signs, like Double Falcon in Lower Egypt, and Elephant in the Upper Kingdom. It is only with the coming of Narmer as king of Upper Egypt that the story of the kings of Egypt can be told with any certainty.

## The first pharaohs

According to the much later Egyptian historian Manetho, the first Egyptian king was Menes. He was the first human to rule Egypt after the gods and demi-gods had been on the throne. "Menes of This, with his 7 descendants, – the king called Men by Herodotus – reigned for 60 years. He made a foreign expedition and won renown, but was carried off by a hippopotamus." Archaeologists have, however, searched in vain for this legendary king.

Narmer, who most now accept as the first king of a united Egypt, is well attested in the historical record. The Narmer Palette, a votive offering dating from around 3,100 BCE in the shape of a palette used for grinding cosmetics, depicts King Narmer wearing both the White Crown - Hedjet - of Upper Egypt and the Red Crown - Deshret - of Lower Egypt. This artefact points to Narmer as being the first ruler of a united Egypt. The palette shows Narmer striking down a captive foe, which suggests

this unification was not a peaceful one. A ceremonial macehead bearing Narmer's name also shows the king as a martial conqueror. On the macehead, prisoners are led before the enthroned king and inscriptions say that he had captured hundreds of thousands of cows, over a million goats, and 120,000 people.

Narmer is therefore considered to be the founder of the 1st Dynasty of Egyptian kings, often referred to as pharaohs, although they did not use that title at the time. The 1st Dynasty established many of the attributes that were associated with pharaohs throughout ancient Egyptian history. Den, the fifth king of the dynasty, was the first to be shown with the Uraeus, the rearing cobra worn on his brow. This snake was thought to spit fire on the enemies of the crown and represented the goddess Wadjet as a protector of the pharaohs. Den was also the first to explicitly name himself as 'Ruler of Upper and Lower Egypt' and to combine the White and Red Crowns of the two kingdoms



into a single crown known as the sekhemty - "the two powerful ones".

The grand burials of kings did not start with the 1st Dynasty, but they expanded the idea. The second king, Djer, had a tomb that later came to be thought of as the tomb of the god Osiris. His funerary complex also contained the corpses of 388 servants, as well as pack animals, slain to provide the pharaoh with service in the afterlife. While servants were buried with all of the 1st Dynasty rulers, later kings would dispense with human sacrifice and suffice themselves with including models of workers to serve them.

## The Old Kingdom

The end of the 1st Dynasty is clouded in mystery. After the long and prosperous reign of Qa'a it appears there were two very short-lived kings, one of whose name is lost and referred to simply as Horus Bird. Whether these were legitimate successors or usurpers is unknown. Evidence for the 2nd Dynasty that ruled Egypt is scanty but it may be that war once again broke out between the Upper and Lower Kingdoms. The name of the last 2nd Dynasty Pharaoh Khasekhemwy, 'The Two Powers Have Appeared', has been interpreted as a boast about reuniting the realm.

The start of the 3rd Dynasty with Pharaoh Djoser is considered the beginning of the Old

Kingdom period of Ancient Egypt. Djoser's nearly 30-year reign saw him institute massive building works that would be copied for millennia to come. Perhaps his most influential creation was a step pyramid for his tomb.

The first pharaoh of the 4th Dynasty was not a direct descendent of the last king but instead gained the throne by marrying a royal heiress. The 4th Dynasty saw pyramids being perfected and built to increasing heights. The Great Pyramid of Giza built for King Khufu dates from this time. Lasting from -2600-2500 BCE, it was an age of increasing trade with neighbouring nations and peace at home.

The glories of the Old Kingdom passed away in the 6th Dynasty when the long reign of Pepi II saw him outlive his heirs, leading to quarrels and civil war among his successors.

A drought that saw the annual inundation of the Nile fail for several years also brought unrest to the region. The tomb of one

of the powerful local governors who also threatened the central government of the realm recorded the difficulties of this time. "I took care of the towns of Hefat and Hor-mer in every situation of crisis, when the sky was clouded and the earth was parched and when everybody died of hunger on this sandbank of Apophis... The whole of Upper Egypt died of hunger and each individual had reached such a state of hunger that he ate his own children."

**The founding pharaoh of the 4th Dynasty was Sneferu. Records tell that he was thought of as a wise and benevolent king**



The Step Pyramid of Djoser was the first of these structures to be built in Egypt, but would be dwarfed by the ones that followed

## FEMALE REGENTS, KINGS, AND PHARAOHS



Images Wiki Ophary

This statue of Hatshepsut as pharaoh shows her with all the accoutrements of kingship - including a flat chest and false beard

The 1st Dynasty of Egypt may also have seen the first female ruler of any state that we know of. Merneith, who ruled around 2950 BCE, was the mother of Den. It seems from inscriptions that she ruled as his regent while he was too young to exercise power, but she could have been king in her own right. Her tomb is certainly pharaonic in scale.

Given the habit of pharaohs marrying close relatives, women of the royal family were very influential. When, as often happened, a pharaoh died before his heir was of age it often fell to the new king's mother to act as regent in his stead. If the male line failed then marriage to a female heir could let a powerful man found a new dynasty.

Despite the heavily patriarchal nature of Ancient Egypt, women did come to rule in their own right several times, even if they called themselves king or pharaoh. Queen Sobeknefru (-1800 BCE) assumed the throne when her father died and ruled as pharaoh. Her images show her in traditional female garb. Later female pharaohs like Hatshepsut preferred to display their kingly power by assuming all the attributes of a pharaoh, including the beard.

The last independent pharaoh of Ancient Egypt, Cleopatra VII, felt no shame in utilising all of her female charms if they could win her greater glory and power.





Great kings of Egypt, like Ramesses II, delighted in carving their images of triumph to proclaim their might

## Golden ages and collapses

The history of Egypt was as dynamic as any other - periods of glorious achievement could easily slip into chaos without a strong hand on the throne

All of Egypt was the personal property of the pharaoh. To administer his domains, the land was split into territories called *nomes* that were controlled on his behalf by *nomarchs*. The *nomarchs* were often members of the royal family and so could, initially at least, be trusted to work with the crown. As these *nomarchs* became hereditary they began to display shows of independence that weakened the central control of Egypt.

From the 7th to the 11th Dynasties the inability to control their vassals was a major problem for pharaohs. While the 8th Dynasty was based in Memphis they required the support of the *nomarchs* of Coptos to rule their realm. Eventually these *nomarchs* rebelled, and crowned themselves as the pharaohs of the 9th Dynasty, ruling from Herakleopolis. The historian Manetho described the founder of this

dynasty, Achthoes, as "behaving more cruelly than his predecessors, wrought woes for the people of all Egypt." Whether this represents reality, it does seem the takeover was violent.

Eventually the 11th Dynasty reunited Egypt under Pharaoh Mentuhotep II by right of conquest - the bodies of 60 of his warriors who died in his battles have been discovered from this time. Mentuhotep II drew power back into his own hands by placing governors over the *nomarchs* to ensure they never caused trouble again. This reorganisation ushered in the period known as the Middle Kingdom.

### The Hyksos

The 13th Dynasty saw a rapid turnover of kings. 50 people claimed the throne in little over 150 years. In this period the crown did not always pass from father to son. Some pharaohs, such as

Sobekhotep III, gloried in their non-royal origins by mentioning the names of their non-royal fathers in inscriptions. It is not known how they reached the throne, but it may be that many rival noble families at the time competed with each other for the succession.

This again weakened Egypt and left it open for conquest by a group of outsiders known as the Hyksos. The Ancient Egyptians told stories of how the Hyksos burst into Egypt like "a blast from God... They had subdued our rulers, they burnt down our cities, and destroyed the temples of the gods, and treated the inhabitants most cruelly." Importantly the Hyksos used chariots and powerful bows that the Egyptians could not match.

Some, however, see the Hyksos not as invaders but settlers. Certainly the Hyksos adopted Egyptian cultural norms and followed



Egyptian religion. Ruling from the northern town of Avaris they are considered the 15th Dynasty. A truncated Egypt was ruled by rival pharaohs from Thebes. Eventually the Theban pharaohs Seqenenre Tao, Kamose and Ahmose drove the Hyksos out.

## The New Kingdom

The recovered Egypt enjoyed power and wealth. The 18th Dynasty founded by Ahmose produced some of the most well-known pharaohs in Egyptian history. Thutmose II's reign is distinguished by his failure to produce a male heir with his chief wife Hatshepsut. His son Thutmose III was born to a lesser wife, but instead of ruling in his own right, for the first 22 years of his reign Hatshepsut was the dominant power. Indeed she had herself crowned as pharaoh and is shown wearing the royal regalia in images.

Once he held power on his own, Thutmose III proved an effective military commander who both defended Egypt against invasion and campaigned beyond its borders. He pushed Egypt to its largest territorial extent. Late in his reign, and possibly under the influence of his heir, attempts were made to completely eradicate all memory of Hatshepsut. Her name was chiselled from monuments and statues were torn down, defaced, and buried. Only the most obvious signs of her reign were targeted, however, which is why so many images of Hatshepsut remain.

Perhaps the most remarkable person ever to sit the throne of Egypt was Akhenaten in the 14th century BCE. Coming to the throne as Amenhotep IV, he set about completely reorganising Egypt's religion. The priesthood of Egypt had always been powerful figures and it may have been to break their influence that he denied the existence of the polytheistic gods that had always been part of Egyptian life.

In the place of myriad gods he introduced the worship of the sun's disc, known as the Aten. All power flowed from the Aten and to the pharaoh, who then passed it on to the rest of the world. The pharaoh was once again at the centre of the divine universe and the priesthood was pushed aside. Some credit Akhenaten as the first monotheist. To underline his break with the polytheistic past he transferred his capital to an entirely new city he constructed, which was known as Akhetaten.

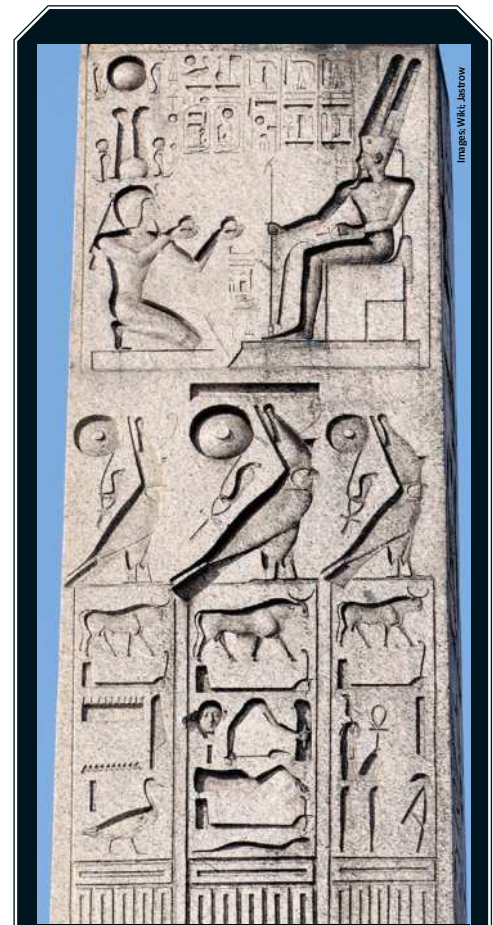
With Akhenaten's death the exclusive worship of the Aten was washed away under Tutankhamun. He restored the traditional faith of Egypt, even changing his name from Tutankhaten to Tutankhamun - replacing the Aten with the old god Amun. The boy pharaoh died young but received unusually fabulous tomb goods, which may have been provided by the grateful priests who had been restored to their positions of power.

The summit of Egyptian power was reached in the reign of the 19th Dynasty Pharaoh Ramesses II in the 13th century BCE. In the course of a 66-year rule Ramesses II fought off the Sea Peoples who raided around the Mediterranean and staved off the collapse that many Bronze

Age civilisations faced at this time. His campaigns into Syria were marked by many successes. At the Battle of Kadesh, thousands of chariots met in a clash between the Egyptians and the Hittites. The resulting peace treaty is one of the best sources on ancient diplomacy that survive. Ramesses II's colossal statues still mark his complete control of Egypt.

The bellicose Egypt that Ramesses II had created could not endure. His wars in Syria, Libia, and Nubia created many enemies. Cash shortages and environmental problems contributed to a weakened central authority. The high priests of Amun in Thebes came to be the true rulers of southern Egypt. Foreign conquerors came to sit the throne of Egypt - an age known as the Third Intermediate Period.

**The wife of Akhenaten was the famously beautiful Queen Nefertiti, who possibly reigned as pharaoh herself**



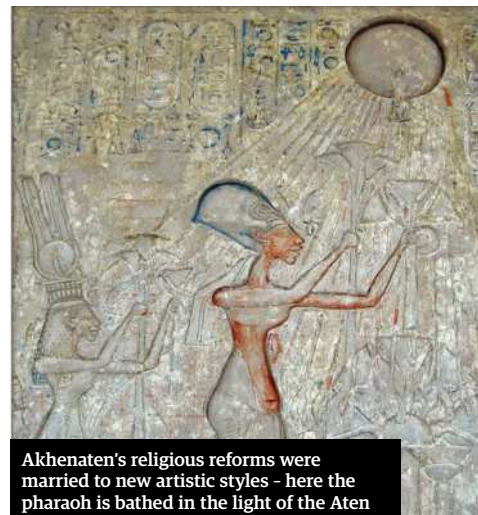
So closely was Horus associated with the pharaohs that from the earliest times his falcon image appeared alongside a king's name

## THE DIVINE PHARAOH

Having a monarch who was also divine was common in the ancient world. Yet difficulties can arise when the very human person sitting the throne seems less than holy. The Egyptians solved some of these issues in the way in which they thought about their rulers. The position of pharaoh was referred to as 'nsw' while the person occupying it was 'hm' - an incarnation.

Egyptian kingship dated back to before the unification of the kingdom and even at that early time it was associated closely with the god Horus. Statues dating back to the 26th century BCE show the pharaoh seated on a throne with the hawk of Horus guarding him. While Horus was most commonly associated with the pharaoh he had other divine attributes. Early pharaohs were considered to be personifications of the balance of destructive and constructive forces of the universe. Serving this balance, Ma'at, was one of the key functions of kingship.

Whether the pharaoh was divine or not, he played a central role in the state religion. By fulfilling certain rites, acting as an intermediary between the people and the gods, and as "High priest of every temple", the pharaoh was the focal point of the state. One of the benefits of his unique position in life was that the pharaoh was granted an honoured place in the afterlife.



Akhenaten's religious reforms were married to new artistic styles - here the pharaoh is bathed in the light of the Aten



# Fall of the pharaohs

The kingdom of Ancient Egypt had survived invasions and chaos before, but despite their yearning for eternity, nothing lasts forever



Cambyses II defeated the Egyptians in battle, leaving them as mere vassals to his empire

**I**n the later years of Pharaoh Ramesses XI's reign (1107-1078 BCE) trouble was already brewing in Egypt. The high priests of Amun were rulers in all but name of Upper Egypt. Fractious servants caused further crises. Pinehesy, Viceroy of the land of Kush, seems to have invaded Thebes with the aim of driving out the high priest Amenhotep. Such a sacrilegious action would have shocked the Egyptians. Pinehesy was driven out, but the hold of the Pharaoh on the valuable gold mines of Kush was left weakened and the state became increasingly poorer.

## Third Intermediate Period

The end of the 20th Dynasty followed Ramesses XI's death and the five succeeding dynasties are often lumped together as the Third Intermediate Period. This time was marked by significant changes to Egyptian society, as outsiders came to hold increasing power and Egypt became less influential outside of its own borders.

The 21st Dynasty was founded by Smendes. Ruling from the northern city of Tanis, the pharaohs tacitly acknowledged that most of Upper Egypt was in the hands of the high priests. Prayers written at the time name the god Amun as the true king of Egypt -

wouldn't that make his priests the most important people in the realm? The kingdom was

held together by the close familial relationships between the royal family and the priests. Several of the later pharaohs of the dynasty claimed the position of high priest for themselves.

The 22nd Dynasty saw kings of Libyan, or Meshwesh, origin. The Meshwesh had settled in

significant numbers in Egypt and Shoshenq, their leader, came to be head of the Egyptian army under Psusennes II. On the latter's death Shoshenq became king and secured his position through marital alliances. Shoshenq attempted to end the theocracy that had weakened previous pharaohs and set out on an expansionist foreign policy. Egypt, however, could no longer support such ambitions.

Shoshenq's successors failed to curb the power of their priests and allowed hereditary priests and governors to form rebellious fiefdoms. At Thebes, the priest Harsiese had himself declared a king. The kingdom was split between rival pharaohs in Thebes, Herakleopolis and Bubastis. The fractured realm was finally welded together again by foreign conquerors when the kings of Kush invaded.

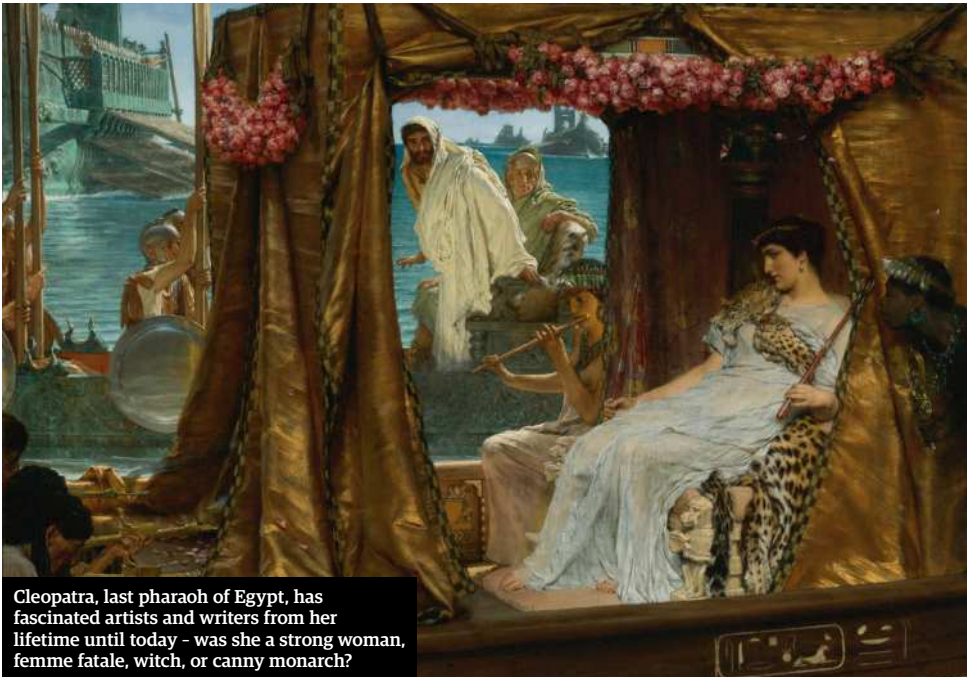
Piye I entered Egypt, we are told, like a raging panther. When his army failed to utterly destroy the Egyptians he raged at them "Have they left a remnant of the army of Lower Egypt, so as to let some of them escape to report the campaign, instead of killing and destroying the last of them? I swear, as Re loves me, as my father Amun favours me, I shall go north myself. I shall tear down his works. I shall make him abandon fighting forever!" Piye founded the 25th, Kushite, Dynasty. War between this dynasty and the powers of Mesopotamia would bring about the end of Egypt as an independent nation.

## Outside powers

After the Assyrian empire sacked Thebes they installed native Egyptians on the throne. Initially vassals who owed allegiance to Assyria, this 26th Dynasty took advantage of instability and rebellion in the empire to declare themselves free once again. In attempting to project their power into the Near East and Levant again,

**Amun, who became the most important god during the New Kingdom, was known as 'The Hidden One'**





Cleopatra, last pharaoh of Egypt, has fascinated artists and writers from her lifetime until today - was she a strong woman, femme fatale, witch, or canny monarch?

## "Cleopatra VII, last pharaoh of Egypt, attempted to expand Egyptian power again"

however, they made enemies. Cambyses II of Persia defeated the last of the native pharaohs in 525 BCE and Egypt became a dominion of the Achaemenid Empire.

While declaring themselves pharaohs in Egypt the 'king of kings' in Persia mostly left the management of his Egyptian lands in the hands of loyal regents. There were rebellions, as when Petubastis III declared himself pharaoh following Cambyses' death. Darius I, Cambyses' heir, commonly known as Darius

the Great, soon put this down and solidified his rule of the area.

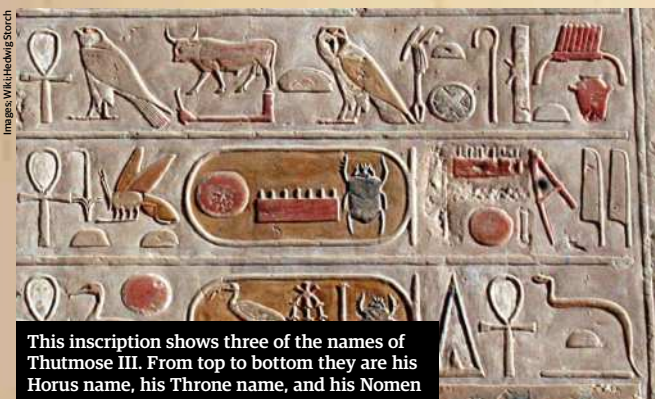
The Achaemenid pharaohs made good use of the gold and crops of Egypt. Using both they created a huge empire. When Xerxes I was buried, his tomb was carved to show how his armies used soldiers from all parts of his empire - including Egypt. Xerxes' invasion of the Greek mainland and the interference there of his successors invited one of history's greatest conquerors to attack them.

Alexander the Great led a small force of Macedonians into Asia to strive with Darius III for rule of his vast empire in 334 BCE. The Achaemenids had only just reconquered Egypt after a revolt and, after several Persian defeats, it was to Egypt that Alexander turned next. Destroying the forces of the Persians in Egypt, he received popular support from the Egyptian nobility, who were always hostile to being ruled by Persia. Alexander took part in local religious rites and had himself crowned as pharaoh. With this nod to native Egyptian tradition he set Egyptians to act as his regents while he renewed his war with the Persians. One of his most momentous acts was to found a great new city at the mouth of the Nile called, with typical modesty, Alexandria.

Alexander managed to conquer the largest empire the world had ever seen at that point, but it soon dissolved after his early death. Ptolemy, one of Alexander's generals, was first appointed governor of Egypt but soon proclaimed himself king and pharaoh of an independent Egypt. Ruling from Alexandria, the Ptolemies created a blended Greek and Egyptian culture.

The Ptolemies were a fractious family whose relationships were not improved by their adoption of the Egyptian policy of marrying siblings to each other. Their dynasty lasted until 30 BCE. Cleopatra VII, last pharaoh of Egypt, attempted to expand Egyptian power again by becoming involved in the political struggles associated with the fall of the Roman Republic. First allying herself with Julius Caesar and then Mark Antony, she tried to gain lands and power for Egypt. Antony's defeat at the Battle of Actium gave mastery of Rome to Octavian, soon to be the Emperor Augustus, and spelled doom for Cleopatra. Famously she took an asp to her breast - a suitably dramatic end for the last in a line of rulers stretching back 3,000 years.

## THE NAMES OF A PHARAOH



This inscription shows three of the names of Thutmose III. From top to bottom they are his Horus name, his Throne name, and his Nomen

While many rulers take on a new name when they come into power, in Egypt the pharaoh was often given five names that were used in their official inscriptions.

The Horus Name saw kings carving their names in Serekhs, stylised images of a palace surmounted by the image of a god - usually Horus.

The Nebty Name means "He of the Two Ladies." These two ladies were Nekhbet and Wadjet - goddesses of Upper and Lower Egypt. Thus the pharaoh was shown as ruling a unified realm under the goddesses' auspices.

The Horus of Gold name once again linked the pharaoh with Horus, but now showed the falcon of the

god above the symbol for gold with a name for the pharaoh underneath. Divinity and wealth were powerfully connected in the ancient world.

The Throne Name or Praenomen was often written in a cartouche symbol and topped with hieroglyphics meaning "He of Sedge and Bee" - symbols of Upper and Lower Egypt.

The Nomen is the name a pharaoh was given at birth, and it is usually the one used by modern historians to distinguish them from other rulers. The personal name of a pharaoh was usually given after the hieroglyphs meaning 'Son of Ra' to show how closely linked the pharaoh was with that important deity.





# Egypt under siege

Despite the view of Ancient Egypt as an eternal and unchanging state over the millennia, it was attacked, conquered, and reinvented countless times

**E**ven to the Ancient Greeks the Egyptians were an ancient culture. And much like today, they viewed Ancient Egypt as a monolithic object that never changed. In fact Egypt underwent several, often violent, revolutions and invasions in its long history.

In the tale known as *The Contendings of Horus and Set* the two gods compete to see who will inherit the throne of Osiris. When the noble Horus is judged to be the true king of Egypt the dark god Set is given the rule of the lands outside Egypt. As Set was a murderous god of chaos, this may give some intimation of how the Egyptians viewed their foreign neighbours.

## The Hyksos

Like all nations, Egypt had faced internal strife from time to time when over-mighty local rulers

were able to oppose the right of pharaohs to rule, but the first major external threat came in the early 2nd millennium BCE with the coming of the Hyksos.

We do not know exactly where the Hyksos came from but it seems they originated in modern Palestine. An account by the 3rd century BCE author Manetho has the Hyksos arrive in great numbers, burning towns and winning many battles before settling, and this has been the generally accepted view of the Hyksos ever since. Now, however, historians

think it likely that the Hyksos migrated into Egypt slowly and peacefully.

At some point in the 17th century BCE, however, the Hyksos did declare themselves rulers over Lower Egypt, the northern half of the country, and set up a capital in the Nile Delta called Avaris. These Hyksos rulers became known as the 15th Dynasty. The contemporary native Egyptian pharaohs ruled a rump state, a mere remnant of their former territory, centred on Thebes. This was also menaced from the south by the Kushite kingdom.

**“Egypt underwent several, often violent, revolutions and invasions in its long history”**



The Hyksos adopted many Egyptian cultural styles including clothing, language, and religion. We know from papyri sources that the Hyksos employed Egyptian scribes and that Egyptian people lived in Avaris alongside them.

A later text called *The Quarrel of Apophis and Seqenenre* describes the interactions of the Egyptian Seqenenre and the Hyksos king, called here Apophis - a name associating him with the serpent god that fights the sun god Ra.

"It once happened that the land of Egypt was in misery... A day came to pass when King Seqenenre, was still only ruler of the Southern City, Thebes. Misery was in the town of the Asiatics, for the Hyksos king Apophis was in Avaris, and the entire land paid tribute to him." We are also told that the Hyksos worshipped only the dark gods of the Egyptian pantheon. "So King Apophis adopted Set for himself as lord, and he refused to serve any god that was in the entire land except Set."

While the 16th Dynasty in Thebes was being squeezed, the Hyksos were introducing many advances to Egyptian culture that would prove vital to Egyptian success in the following centuries. Alongside new words, musical instruments, crops, and fortification techniques, improvements to recurve bows, composite bows, and new chariots allowed for Hyksos military successes. To defeat the Hyksos the Egyptians

would have to learn from them and embrace their advanced technologies.

The Kamose Stele (a stone monument) at Karnak describes how Pharaoh Kamose defended the capital Thebes against the Hyksos. "When breakfast time came I overthrew him having destroyed his walls and slaughtered his people, and made his wife descend to the river bank. My army acted like lions with their spoil - chattels, cattle, fat, honey - dividing their things, their hearts joyful."

It was Pharaoh Ahmose (-1550-1525 BCE) who finally beat back the Hyksos and reunified Egypt under his rule, ushering in the beginning of the New Kingdom. Reliefs from his cult sites at Abydos suggest Ahmose led the siege against the Hyksos at their capital of Avaris. Fragments of these reliefs are the earliest Egyptian depictions of massed chariots and horsemanship.

**The riches and historical significance of Egypt have proved irresistible to many conquerors over the centuries**

## The Sea Peoples

Around 1250-1150 BCE, cultures around the eastern Mediterranean suffered a terrible calamity. All over the region signs of fires, invasions, and abandonment can be found in the archaeological record. This Late Bronze Age Collapse saw the fall of the great age of Mycenaean Greece and the Hittite Empire. One of the causes of this darkening age may have been the violent migration of people in boats from the north. Known only as the Sea Peoples, this mysterious force soon turned its attentions on the wealth of Egypt.

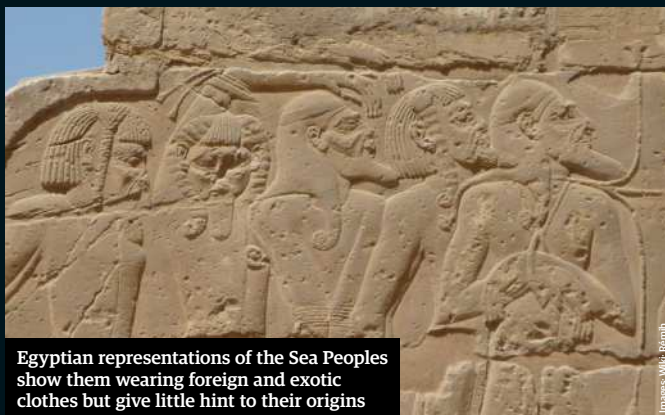


After the conquest of Egypt by the Rashidun Caliphate in 640 CE the country was ruled by Mamluks and Ottomans

The coming of the Sea Peoples was not a one-off event. Pharaoh Merneptah had to drive off a confederation of Sea Peoples known as the Nine Bows around the year 1200 BCE. They had raided down the coast of the Mediterranean and left the lands they visited in ruins: "It was abandoned as pasture for cattle." Merneptah tells us that he managed to defeat them and even counted the number of his dead enemies - by cutting off their hands and penises for an accurate tally.

The most famous attack of the Sea Peoples came during the reign of Ramesses III. An inscription at Medinet Habu describes not just

## THE SEA PEOPLES



Egyptian representations of the Sea Peoples show them wearing foreign and exotic clothes but give little hint to their origins

Ever since the first evidence of the Sea Peoples emerged, archaeologists have been seeking to understand who they were. Inscriptions left by the Egyptians do not describe a single set of people, but multiple tribes coming from the sea. They do not give their origins but list their names: Sherdan, Denyan, Lucca, Peleset, and Ekwesh. These names may give us our best clues as to who they were. Most scholars agree that the Peleset were Philistines, while the Lucca came from Lycia. The Denyan may have been the Danoi from Greece. More intriguing is why the Sea Peoples came at all.

The Sea Peoples all seem to have come from the north, and were not simply an army. Whole populations do not usually set out for new lands unless there is some extreme pressure driving them on. We know that there were climactic changes occurring around 1200 BCE, with evidence of droughts and crop failures. We even have letters from Hittite rulers describing famines - "I have no grain in my lands." It may be that the only hope the Sea Peoples had to survive these challenges was to seek a new home, or at least seize produce and goods from their neighbours.



an army but a nation on the move - women, children, animals, and goods all followed the warriors into Egypt. Several battles occurred when "the northern countries, which were in their isles, were quivering in their bodies. They penetrated the channels of the Nile mouths." At a battle in the delta of the Nile the Egyptians were able to turn back the Sea Peoples, who then disappear from the historical record except for tantalising hints that the pharaohs may have settled some of them in Canaan. Thanks to their victories, the Egyptians were able to withstand the worst of the Late Bronze Age Collapse.

## Fall of the New Kingdom

The New Kingdom saw Egypt reach its greatest territorial extent with Egypt at the heart of a complex trading and diplomatic network. Internal struggles fractured the kingdom, however. During the reign of Ramesses XI from 1107 BCE, onwards the high priests of Amun at Thebes held much of the power in Upper Egypt. While there were successful pharaohs in this period, eventually civil war fatally weakened the kingdom and left it open to attack.

Nubian kings had projected their power into Upper Egypt before, but forces from the Nubian kingdom of Kush to the south under King Piye conquered the rest of the kingdom around 732 BCE. An inscription left by Piye describes how he defeated a coalition of Egyptian rulers to take control of the delta of the Nile. Eventually, it seems opposition collapsed in the face of his armed strength. He warned his enemies



Ancient Egyptian pharaohs were often depicted in chariots, but the chariot was a weapon of war they borrowed from Hyksos invaders

succeeded in driving the Nubian dynasty from the throne of Egypt. Esarhaddon's account of his victory suggests it was total.

"Memphis, his [Pharaoh Taharqa's] royal city, in half a day, with mines, tunnels, assaults, I besieged, I captured, I destroyed, I devastated, I burned with fire. His queen, his harem, Ushanahuru, his heir, and the rest of his sons

support finally succeeded in overthrowing the empire. The new Neo-Babylonian Empire ruled all of the territory of the former Assyrian Empire but a remnant of the Assyrians fled to the city of Carchemish, which was then under Egyptian rule. Pharaoh Neccho II allied with the Assyrian king Ashur-uballit II and marched to his aid against the Babylonians in 609 BCE.

The battle of Carchemish was a decisive defeat for the Egyptian/Assyrian army. Their larger force was swept away by the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar II. The total numbers of warriors on each side are not known definitively, but a Babylonian text tells us that "He [Nebuchadnezzar] accomplished their defeat and beat them to non-existence. As for the rest of the Egyptian army, which had escaped from the defeat so quickly that they brought no weapon with them, in the district of Hamath the Babylonian troops overtook and defeated them so that not a single man escaped to his country."

Neccho's descendent Psamtik III ruled Egypt for a mere six months. His coronation had been marred by a freak shower of rain, rare in Thebes, that struck many as an ill omen. At the Battle of Pelusium in the Nile Delta the Egyptian army was destroyed. Herodotus records that 50,000 Egyptian warriors fell to the new Achaemenid Empire of Persia. When the Egyptians retreated to Thebes they were besieged. The city was taken when, according to the Greek historian Polyanius, the Persian forces carried cats with them. As cats were sacred to the Egyptians they would not risk harming them. Many Egyptians

## "Thanks to their victories, the Egyptians were able to withstand the worst of the Late Bronze Age Collapse"

besieged in one town: "Look, two ways are before you; choose as you wish. Open, you live; close, you die. My majesty will not pass by a closed town." He founded the 25th, or Nubian, Dynasty that ruled Egypt for 100 years.

Piye attempted to use his now-unified kingdoms of Kush and Egypt to destabilise the Assyrian Empire in Mesopotamia by sending armies to help rebels there. This was a failure but Piye's successors would continue to struggle with Assyria. When King Esarhaddon of Assyria tired of their meddling he invaded Egypt, though seemingly more as a way of securing his trade routes in the eastern Mediterranean than increasing his empire.

His first attempt to conquer Egypt was a disaster, discussed in circumspect language by Assyrian sources, but the second invasion

and daughters, his property and his goods, his horses, his cattle, his sheep, in countless numbers, I carried off to Assyria. The root of Kush I tore up out of Egypt and not one therein escaped to submit to me. Over all of Egypt I appointed anew kings, viceroys, governors, commandants, overseers and scribes."

While Taharqa's son tried to reconquer Egypt, the Assyrians defeated him, and Egypt remained a vassal of the Assyrian Empire. The first pharaoh of the 26th Dynasty, Psamtik I, was chosen by the Assyrians as he was a native Egyptian who had remained loyal to them since their first invasion, though he eventually threw off their yoke.

The Assyrian Empire was not without its own internal struggles, however. The rebellions that earlier Egyptian pharaohs had attempted to



were executed but the pharaoh was captured alive, and committed suicide after attempting to raise the Egyptians against their new overlords.

Cambyses of the Achaemenid Empire was crowned as pharaoh of Egypt, and Egypt itself became no more than a satrapy of the Empire. The kings of the Persian Empire constitute the 27th Dynasty. Egypt regained native rule under a series of short-lived dynasties after they rebelled against Persia at a time of internal unrest in the empire. Egyptian independence was achieved thanks to the use of mercenary forces under Greek generals. In 343 BCE, however, the Achaemenids were once again in control of Egypt - but within ten years a new foreign ruler was in charge.

## Alexander and the Ptolemies

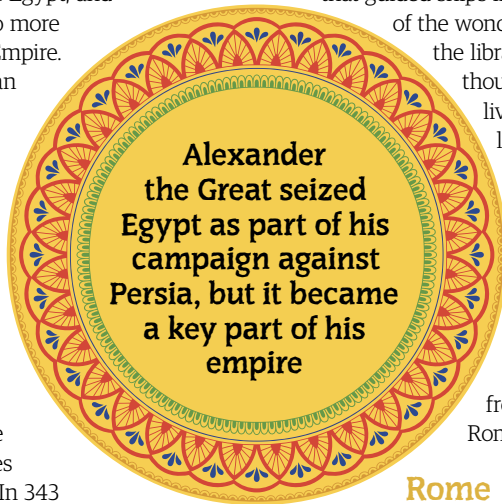
Alexander III of Macedon, Alexander the Great, had an unquenchable thirst for conquest and there was no greater prize than the Persian Empire. Exploiting the traditional Greek hatred of the Persians he led his forces into Persia and inflicted a stunning series of defeats on the great empire. Instead of heading directly for the heart of Persia after his first victories he turned his attention to Egypt - the territory that fed Persia food and gold.

The Egyptians capitulated to their new ruler more out of hatred for their former masters rather than their love of Alexander. Alexander was crowned pharaoh however, and did his best to placate his new subjects. He worshipped at their temples and visited the oracle of Amun where he was declared the son of a god. He also planned the great city of Alexandria at the mouth of the Nile, which would become the new centre of Egypt. When Alexander returned to his wars in Asia he left Egyptians in control of their own country - though taxes would still have to be regularly sent to him.

When Alexander died it was not clear who would inherit his empire. A brief regency for Alexander's infant son saw Egypt placed under the governorship of Ptolemy, one of Alexander's companions and generals. Ptolemy soon asserted his own rule and declared himself ruler of an independent Egypt, making himself king when the other heirs of Alexander's territories did so. The Ptolemaic Dynasty ruled Egypt as a Hellenised kingdom but adopted Egyptian styles

of behaviour, dress and governance to create a blended realm.

Alexandria became one of the great centres of civilisation in the Mediterranean. The lighthouse that guided ships into its harbour was one of the wonders of the world and the library contained copies of thousands of texts. Scholars living and working in the library formed a nucleus of learning that was unrivalled anywhere and is still legendary today. The wealth of Egypt became proverbial and its grain flowed outwards as gold flowed in - especially from the expanding Roman Empire.



## Rome

Rome took a great interest in the activities of its neighbours, especially when they provided vital imports. The politics of the Ptolemies were as complex as their familial relations, with later generations adopting the Egyptian habit of marrying siblings. The rivalries of the family threatened the grain supply, and so the Romans came to Egypt.

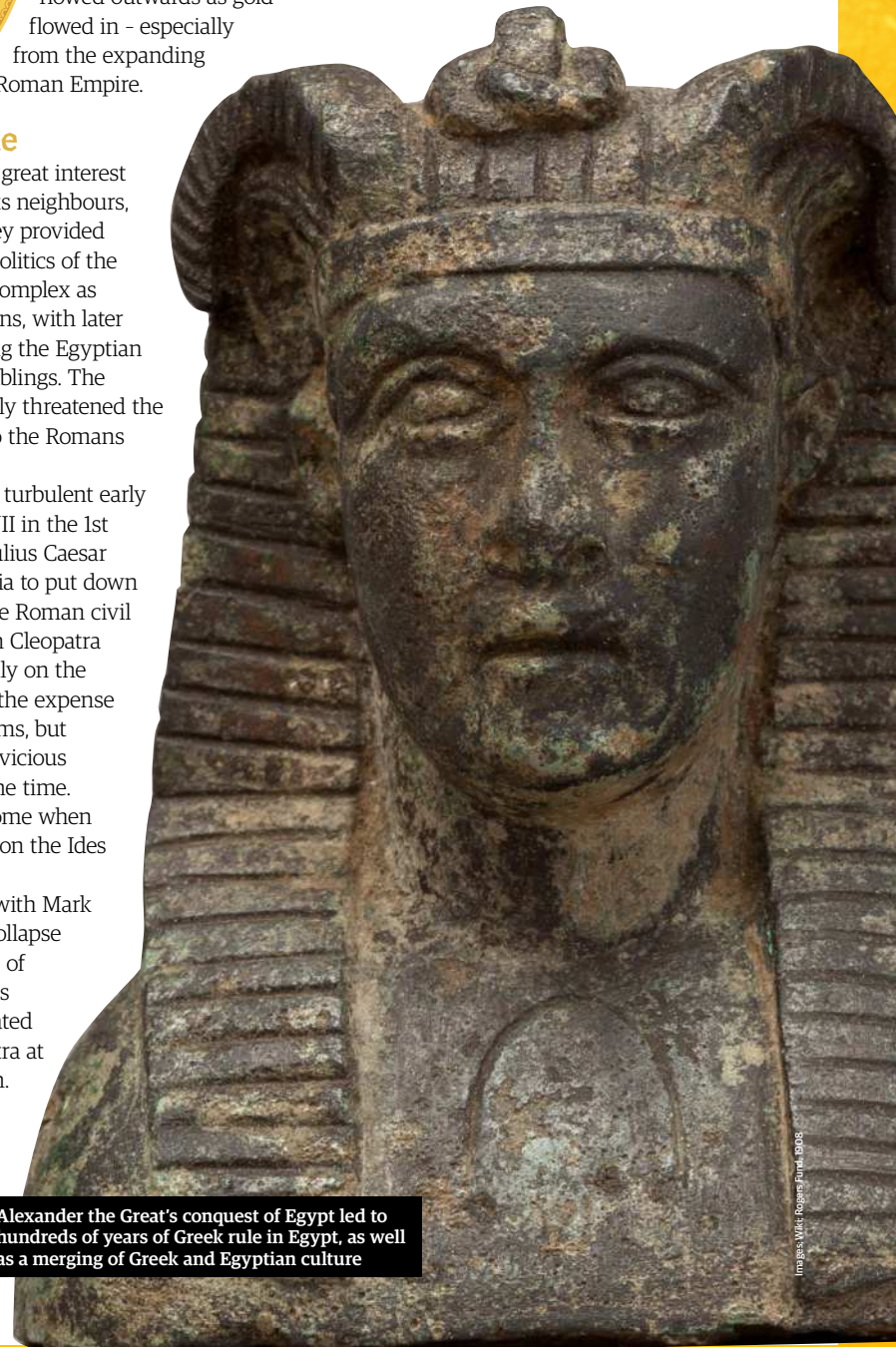
It was during the turbulent early reign of Cleopatra VII in the 1st century BCE that Julius Caesar arrived in Alexandria to put down his opponents in the Roman civil wars. His affair with Cleopatra saw her placed firmly on the Egyptian throne at the expense of her brothers' claims, but involved her in the vicious Roman politics of the time. Cleopatra was in Rome when Caesar met his fate on the Ides of March.

Her relationship with Mark Antony led to the collapse of the Ptolemaic rule of Egypt when Caesar's heir Augustus defeated Antony and Cleopatra at the Battle of Actium. Cleopatra and Antony retreated to Egypt but Augustus' armies surrounded

them and the pair committed suicide. Egypt now passed into the hands of Rome, and specifically the emperor.

Egypt was viewed as the personal property of the emperor. The two harvests of grain Egypt produced per year were vital to the stability of the empire, as food shortages in Rome could lead to mobs of hungry citizens marching through the streets. It was so important to feeding the city that no senator was allowed to go there without the express permission of the emperor - for fear they may lead a rebellion and starve Rome.

With the division of the Roman Empire in the 4th century, Egypt found itself as a province of the Eastern Empire centred on Constantinople.



Alexander the Great's conquest of Egypt led to hundreds of years of Greek rule in Egypt, as well as a merging of Greek and Egyptian culture





Christianity became ever more important and native religion dwindled. Despite the best efforts of the Byzantines, Egypt fell to the resurgent Sasanian Persian Empire in the 7th century, and then the Muslim Rashidun caliphate.

### After antiquity

The loss of Egypt to the Byzantine Empire was a crucial one, as its wealth and produce fell into the hands of their enemies. The Muslim Conquest of Egypt introduced a new faith to the region that has persisted to this day. The Muslim conquerors created a system that taxed non-Muslims to support the troops that were stationed in Egypt, but allowed their new

## **“The Muslim Conquest of Egypt introduced a new faith to the region that has persisted to this day”**

subjects to follow their own religion. Under the Caliphate, Muslim rulers of Egypt were put in place and ruled from Cairo. Invasion by Mamluks and the Ottomans did little to change the course of Egyptian society as it became increasingly Arabic. As a province of the Ottoman Empire the appointed governors ruled Egypt but were frequently frustrated by the politics of various groups jockeying for power.

In 1798 Napoleon Bonaparte led a French invasion of Egypt, supposedly in support of the Egyptian people against the Mamluk elite, but possibly with the idea of annexing the country. Largely successful in taking control of Egypt, Napoleon opened up vast new areas for French scholars to explore. In the train of his army came many researchers and artists who recorded antiquities in previously



Images Wiki Commons

At the Battle of the Pyramids, Napoleon wiped out almost the entire Ottoman army in Egypt and opened up the country to European investigation



unseen detail. Richly illustrated books sparked renewed interest in Egypt by Europeans and Egyptomania influenced art and culture for decades to come.

In 1807 the British poet Robert Southey wrote "Everything now must be Egyptian. The ladies wear crocodile ornaments, and you sit upon a sphinx in a room hung round with mummies." He noted "The very shopboards must be metamorphosed into the mode, and painted in Egyptian letters, which, as the Egyptians had no letters, you will doubtless conceive must be curious." Egyptian writing, however, was about to become far more interesting.

The most startling result of the Napoleonic invasion was the decipherment of Egyptian hieroglyphics. These writings covered virtually every surface yet could not be read. The discovery of the Rosetta Stone changed this. Bearing the same inscription copied out three times in Egyptian Hieroglyphs, Demotic Egyptian, and Greek, it allowed scholars to finally understand how hieroglyphics worked.

Though the French were swiftly driven from Egypt, European interest in the region only increased. As a vital crossroad for the British Empire, it became British policy to

**Napoleon's conquest of Egypt led to a vogue for Egyptian history, which is the reason why Egyptology became so popular**



Cats may have been used by the Persian forces at the Battle of Pelusium as a form of psychological warfare - Egyptians were afraid of harming their sacred animals

control the region. After defeating the Egyptian army in 1882 Britain declared Egypt to be a British protectorate. Under British control, British archaeologists were given a free hand in excavating many sites. Museums around the world filled with Egyptian artefacts. While Egyptians regained control of their country in 1952, the ancient culture of their nation

has become a worldwide possession. Ancient Egyptian mummies are the most visited exhibitions in museums across the globe. Our fascination with Egypt has influenced everything from architecture to jewellery, yet we risk forgetting the rich, and often bloody, history it has to offer if we don't look beyond the surface glitter of these treasures.

## ALEXANDRIA: LIGHTHOUSE TO THE WORLD

After the Ptolemaic Dynasty came to power in Egypt they converted Alexandria into a great trading city. They also succeeded in creating a melting pot of various civilisations that influenced the cultural life of Mediterranean for centuries.

Initially founded by Alexander the Great in 331 BCE, Alexandria became the capital of the Ptolemies. Seeking to outdo the other successor states of Alexander's empire, they built on a massive scale. One of their first moves to claim pre-eminence was to steal Alexander's corpse and have it buried in a tomb at Alexandria. The huge lighthouse standing over 100m tall in the harbour was acknowledged as

one of the wonders of the world. The Ptolemaic rulers were also aggressive collectors of texts for their library, often raiding ships so that all scrolls could be copied - they kept the originals and returned the copies.

In the city Greeks lived side by side with both the native population and a thriving Jewish community, and these were joined by early Christians. The intermixing of ideas led to a wave of intellectual creativity. The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Jewish Torah, took place in Alexandria. This melting pot did sometimes boil over into strife, but Alexandria continued to be one of the centres of civilisation in the ancient world.



Alexandria established itself as one of the most important cities in the Mediterranean in little more than 100 years



# Tomb raiders

Almost every Ancient Egyptian tomb was robbed – those responsible did not always get away with it

**T**omb raiding was commonplace in Ancient Egypt – very few tombs are found that have not been systematically looted. It is believed to have started in earnest, or at least to have become a problem on a large enough scale to trigger a response, in the Early Dynastic Period, starting around 3150 BCE.

It was then that burial chambers started to be designed in order to frustrate would-be thieves.

From simply filling the access tunnels with boulders, rocks and wooden beams to more sophisticated diversion attempts – though actual traps were not employed – efforts were made to protect the resting places of the royal and the rich.

The efforts were futile, however, and the daubing of curses on walls and doorways was equally ineffective. Even the most elaborate of the tombs, the pyramids at Giza, proved vulnerable. All of the pyramids had empty burial chambers when they were explored – treasure, coffins, even the mummies themselves, had all long since been removed.

Tomb raiding was a problem with no apparent solution, and there are several surprising reasons for this. The robbers are often imagined as shadowy, desperate men, holding flaming torches and risking their lives in perilous tunnels, but the reality was often far less dramatic. Tomb raiding became almost a humdrum activity in Ancient Egypt – and it was often condoned by the state itself.

As any Egyptologist will tell you, most tombs were raided within weeks of being sealed up. Some were even pillaged before burial had taken place. This was often a destructive process, with the raiders deliberately destroying anything that had no value. They were also prone to destroying the mummies – first ripping them apart in a search for precious jewellery and then setting fire to the corpses to prevent the possibility of a

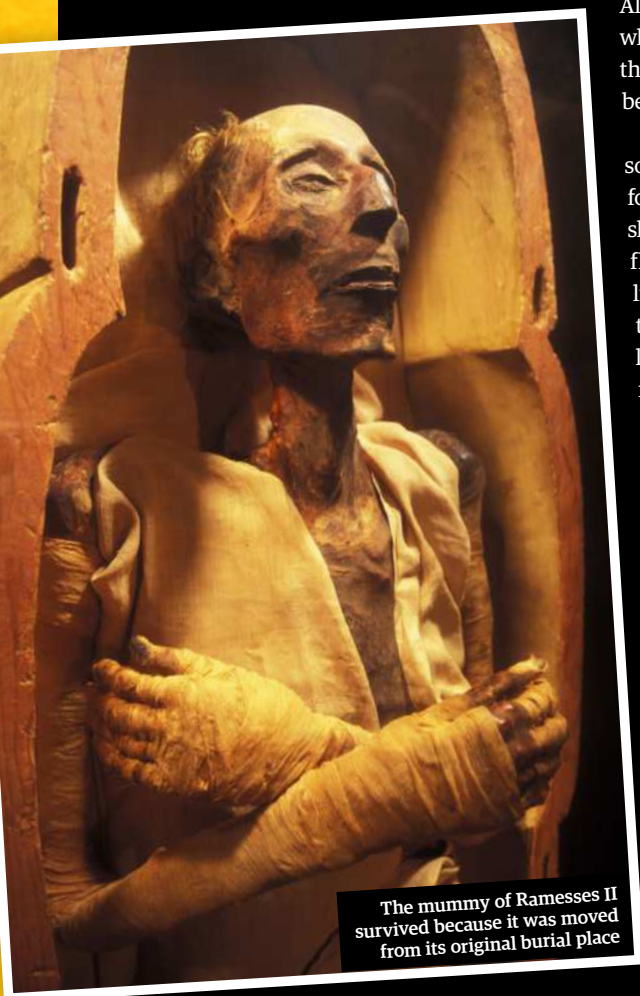


haunting. Curiously, although superstition was clearly a part of the Ancient Egyptians' make-up, this did not prevent them from desecrating the tombs of the mighty. Depriving a mummy of the materials it needed in the afterlife was no small act – it was literally robbing the person of any chance of an immortal existence.

Attempts to guard against this were stepped up in the period known as the New Kingdom of Egypt, which began around 1570 BCE. Amenhotep I had the bright idea of ordering tombs to be built out in the desert, making them harder to reach. The sites he chose became known as the Valley of the Kings and the Valley of the Queens, and he built a village, Deir el-Medina, to house the workers who built the tombs.

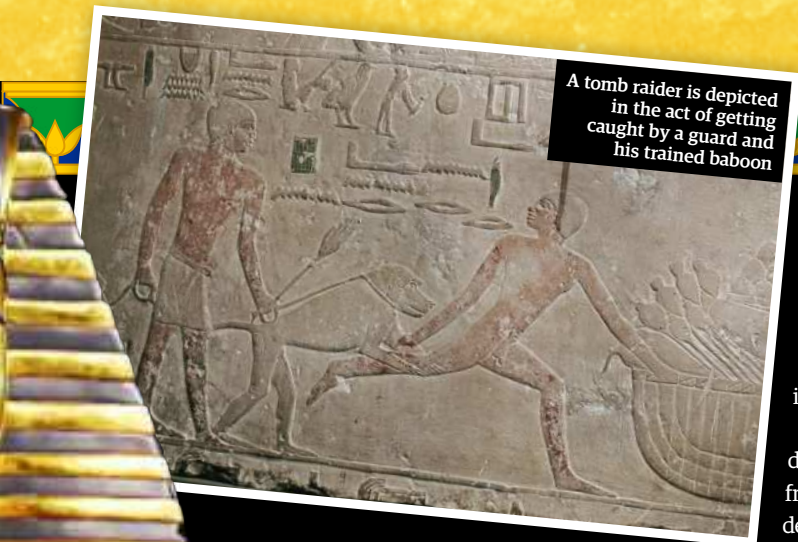
The theory appeared sound – the workers were dependent on the tombs for their livelihood, so they would be loyal and prevent others from robbing them. In actual fact, it was often the

**The village of Deir el-Medina is located on the west bank of the Nile, across the river from modern-day Luxor**



The mummy of Ramesses II survived because it was moved from its original burial place





A tomb raider is depicted in the act of getting caught by a guard and his trained baboon

King Tutankhamun's spectacular gold death mask would almost certainly have been looted if his tomb had not been accidentally buried

workers themselves who did the raiding. Knowing where a tomb was, how it had been built and what security measures had been incorporated into its design were vital bits of information, which the workers were obviously all too aware of.

The raiders were also not necessarily in search of fabulous wealth. A shortage of food and water for labourers during the reign of Ramesses III led to a strike, believed to be the first such strike in history, and also

to a surge in tomb raiding, as men sought a way to simply feed themselves and their families. With valuable materials easily accessible in unguarded tombs, the poor and underprivileged could treat them as little more than a cash machine to be visited repeatedly when times were hard.

Shifting large quantities of gold and precious stones was also difficult, so many thefts were on a small scale. There was no system of currency at the time, so loot could only be exchanged for goods. Wood was often equally desirable, especially towards the end of the 20th Dynasty when Egypt was weak and imports of quality timber hard to come by. Ripping up the floors of tombs - this happened in the chamber of Ramesses II, although his mummy had been moved and survived intact - and pulling off doors gave robbers a useful supply of wood, which could easily be transformed into new forms. Carbon dating of some coffins has revealed great discrepancies in the ages of different sections, suggesting that some parts had been 'recycled' from earlier burials.

Such recycling was often undertaken for different reasons. Burying large quantities of the nation's wealth every time an important member of society died was economically

draining, and it often made sense to reclaim some of it at a later date. In this way, the current pharaoh might sanction the raiding of much older tombs in order to furnish his own.

The regularity of raiding does not mean it was a risk-free enterprise. Detailed descriptions of the trials of robbers make it abundantly

clear that punishments could be severe, ranging from a simple beating on the soles of the feet to the cutting off of a man's nose or hands, or even execution in the most serious cases.

Despite this, career criminals often took a light-hearted view of their profession, as the confession of one tomb raider makes clear. Amenpanufer, a stonemason, was caught in the act around 1110 BCE, and his testimony betrays a casual attitude to his crime: "We went to rob the tombs, as is our usual habit," he revealed, "and we found the tomb of King Sobekemsaf... we collected the gold that we found on the mummy of the god, including the amulets and jewels which were on his neck. We set fire to their coffins."

## "It was often the workers themselves who did the raiding"

Amenpanufer appears to have been able to escape punishment by paying a bribe, claiming that he was then reimbursed by the other members of his gang. Afterward his tomb raiding continued.

One of the most well-preserved tombs, that of Tutankhamun, makes it clear how rare it was for a chamber to go unpillaged. Although it was robbed, probably twice, in its early days, builders constructing a tomb for Ramesses VI accidentally buried Tutankhamun's tomb completely. Only this random event prevented King Tut from enduring the same fate as most of the others who had gone before him.

The ruins of Deir el-Medina, near the Valley of the Kings



The pyramids made it easy for would-be robbers to locate a tomb





# Egyptology through time

From ancient Greek explorers to Napoleonic conquerors, Egyptology has a far lengthier and illustrious history than you may have first believed

**F**ew other civilisations have ignited as much intrigue and hype as Ancient Egypt. A new discovery or even just a new theory about the lost kingdom draws just as much attention from the general public as it does academics. Children, meanwhile, seem to have an almost innate fascination with it. Whether it is the eeriness of its mummies or the engineering prowess of the pyramids, there is something about this ancient kingdom that has truly captured the imagination of people from all walks of life.

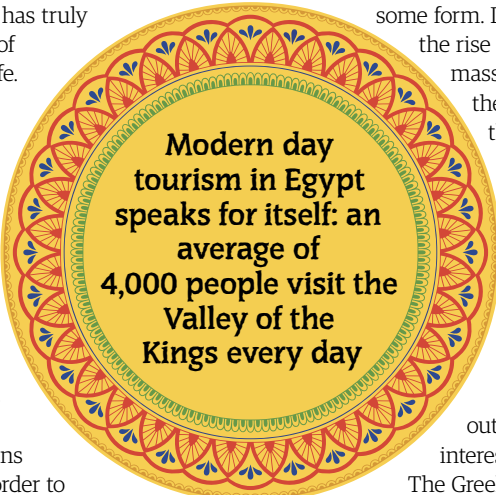
Egyptomania, as this fascination has become known, reached fever pitch in 1922 when Howard Carter, arguably the most famous Egyptologist of all time, discovered the intact tomb of Tutankhamun. However, the interest in the history of Egypt spans back as far as antiquity itself. The Ancient Egyptians did not study the past in order to understand the present, as we do today, but they listed kings and recorded events that occurred during their reign in order to establish their legitimacy, or *ma'at* - the proper order of things. For them, the past was fixed, although they also believed that it could and should be corrected so that unpopular events or people could be erased from memory. Ironically, the kings and queens whose existence they tried to deny are now some of the best known of the ancient land.

The restoration and conservation of monuments first occurred during pharaonic times. Thutmose IV restored the sphinx and had the dream that inspired this restoration carved on the famous Dream Stele. Less than two centuries later, Khaemwaset, the fourth son of Ramesses II, cleared and restored several structures around Giza and Sakkara, leading him to be considered 'the first Egyptologist'. Archaeology also existed, at least in

some form. During the Middle Kingdom, the rise of the cult of Osiris led to a mass search for his tomb, which the Ancient Egyptians believed they found. Of course, rather than being that of a god, it in fact belonged to the First Dynasty king Djet. The tomb was renovated and further refurbishments were conducted during the New Kingdom era.

Greece was the first place outside of Egypt to show an interest in the latter's antiquity.

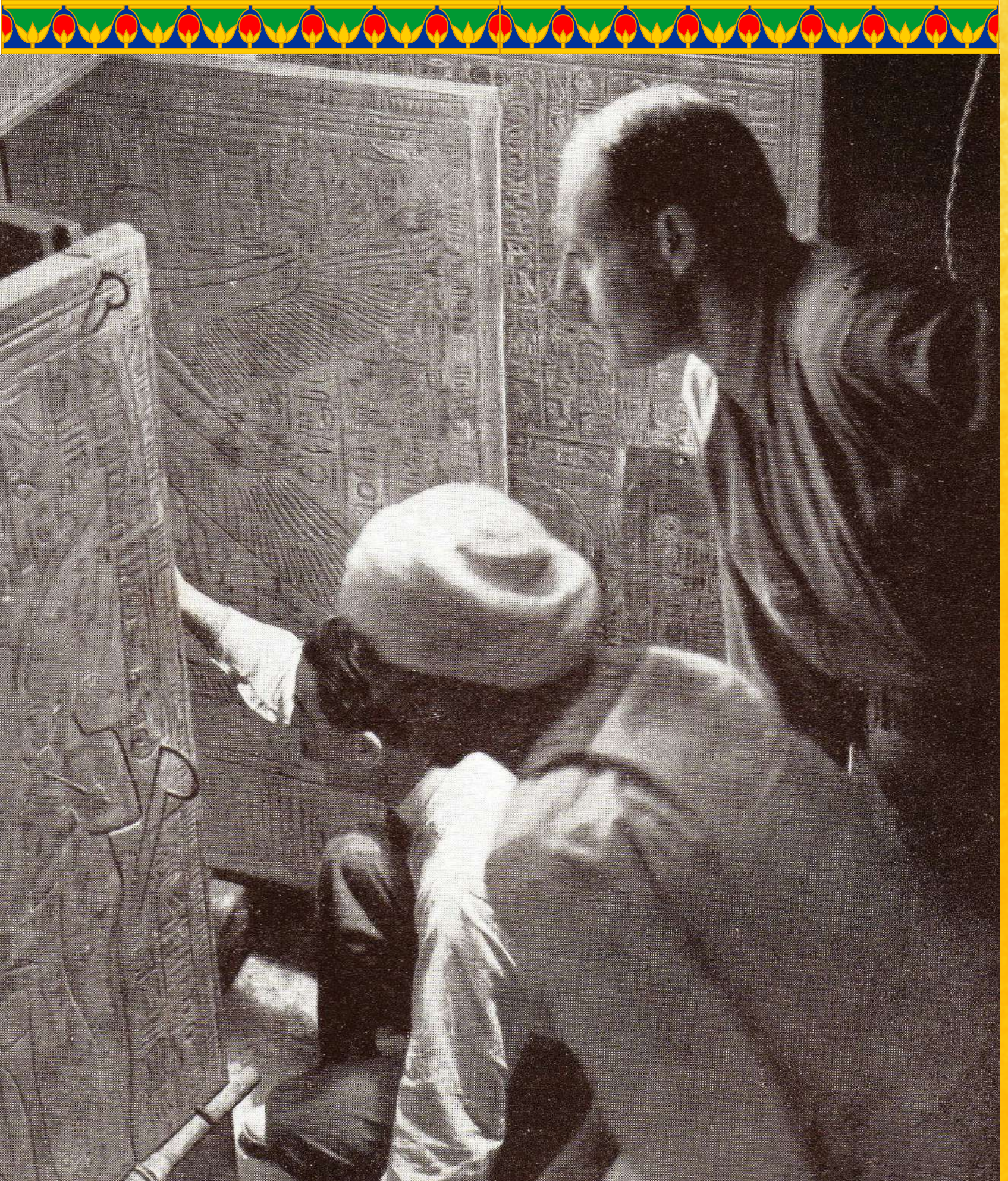
The Greek historian Herodotus visited Egypt around 450 BCE and wrote a detailed account of life there, although many of his observations have since been dismissed as inaccurate, with some claiming that Egyptology would have been better off without him. During Ptolemaic times, another Greek historian, Hecataeus, composed his *Ægyptiaka*, a history of Egypt that credited Ancient Egypt as being the source of the civilised arts and crafts. The Ptolemies themselves were also interested in the



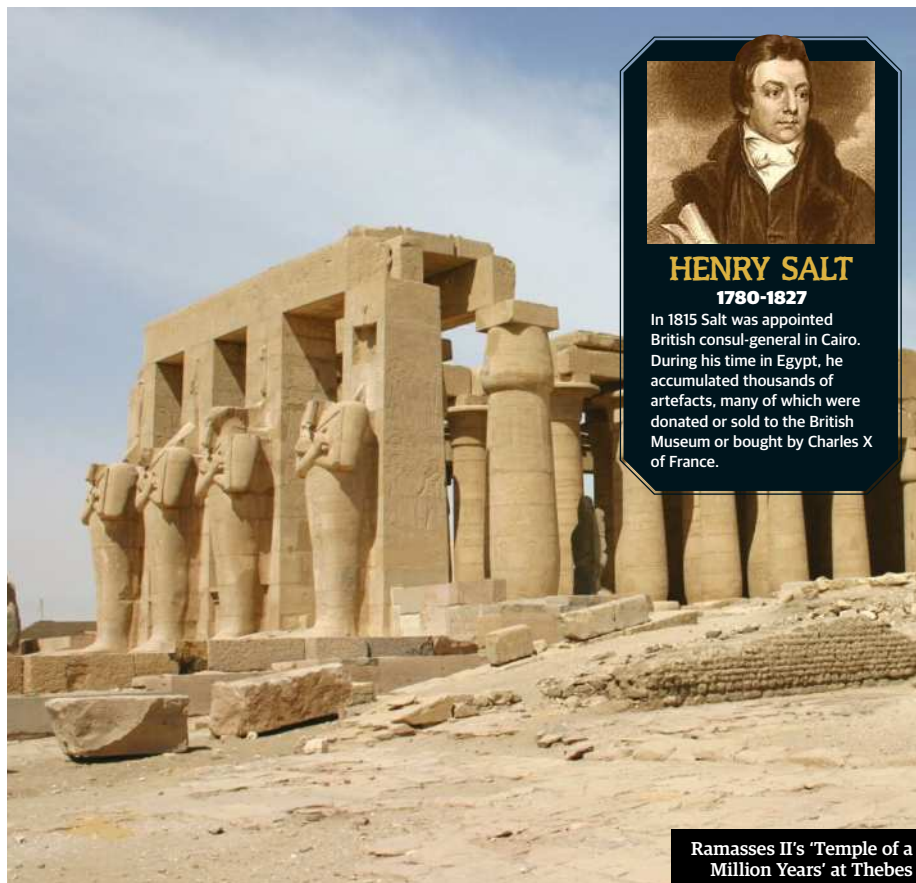
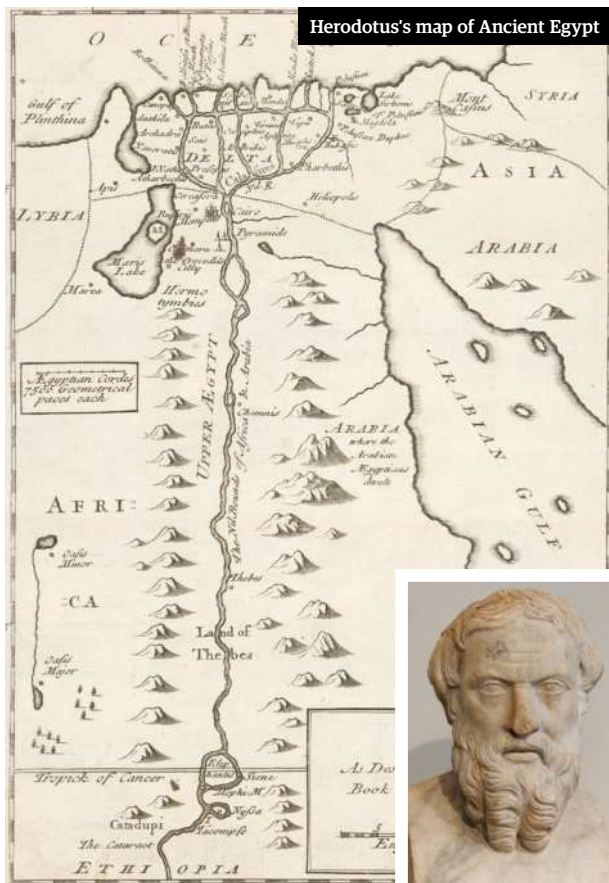
**Modern day  
tourism in Egypt  
speaks for itself: an  
average of  
4,000 people visit the  
Valley of the  
Kings every day**











work of the Ancient Egyptians, and many of the Egyptian monuments, including the pyramids, were restored by them. The most comprehensive work from the Greco-Roman period, though, was by a native Egyptian, Manetho. Most of his work has been lost, but it is from him that the dynastic system, the organising framework of pharaonic history, is derived.

In 30 BCE Octavian, who later became emperor Augustus, defeated Marcus Antonius and Cleopatra VII, the last ruler of the Ptolemaic Dynasty, and Egypt became part of the Roman Empire. Egyptomania struck for the first time, as Egyptian art and artefacts were exported to Rome. Even the two religions began to merge. Several notable Roman sages, including Hermes Trismegistus and Pliny the Elder, wrote extensively about Ancient Egypt, inspiring many more Romans to visit this mysterious kingdom. However, the introduction of Christianity in 68 CE

marked the beginning of a move away from Egypt's heritage. Temples were transformed into monasteries, hieroglyphs were condemned as 'nonsense', and pagans were lynched. By the end of the 5th century, the transformation to a Christian society was complete, and interest in the Ancient Egyptians was lost.

The Arab conquest of Egypt in 642 CE opened Egypt up to Muslim scholars and travellers, some who came from overseas and some from Egypt itself. The Egyptian historian Abu Jafar al-Idrisi carried out a study of the pyramids in the 13th century, providing descriptions of location, size, measurements and even an analysis of the mineral content of the stones.

But one of the most powerful incentives for investigation into Ancient Egypt was treasure hunting. Even in pharaonic times, tombs were being raided for their contents, and this practice continued down the ages. Treasure-hunting manuals became a literary genre, with a significant chunk of these books dedicated to evading the magic that guarded the treasures. It was also around this time that European exploration and

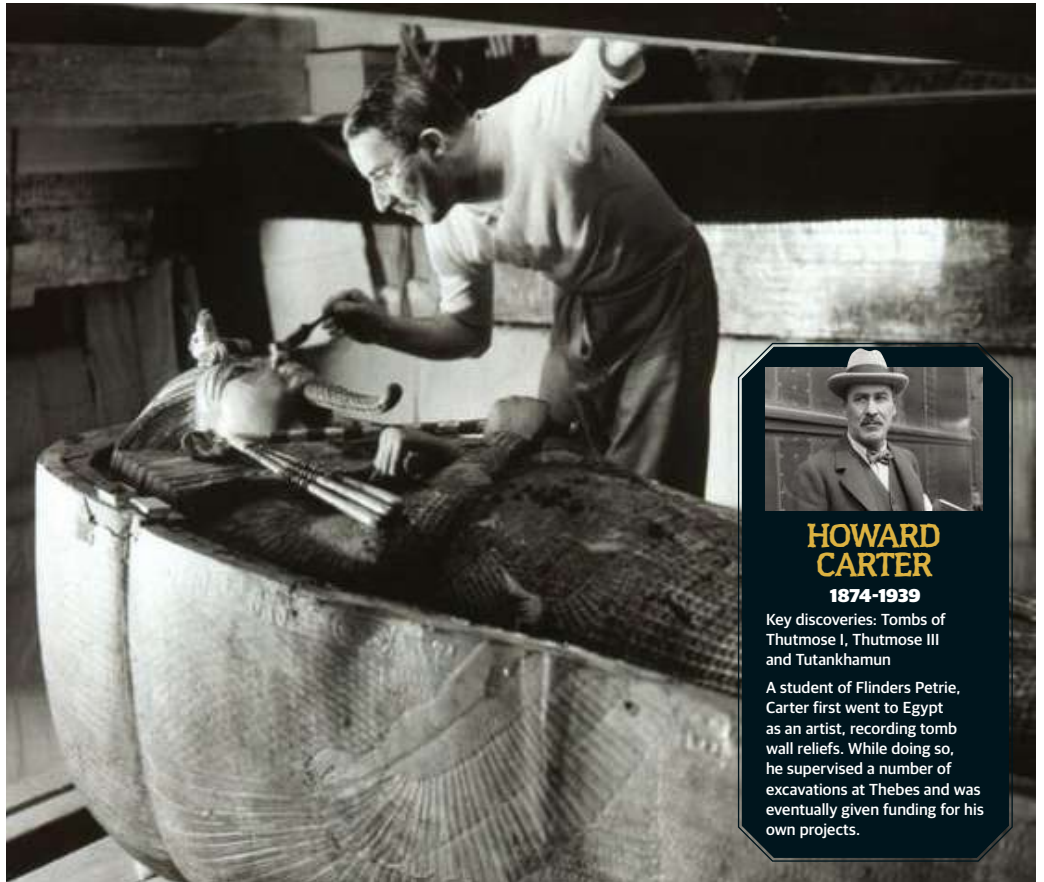
**Most of the tombs in the Valley of the Kings were robbed within 100 years of being sealed, leaving little opulence to discover**





study of Ancient Egypt began. Then came the Renaissance, which sparked a new interest in classical antiquity, Egypt included. Its teachings were considered a source of great knowledge, and the first attempts were made to decipher hieroglyphics. Bizarrely, mummies also began to be mined extensively for the alleged medicinal properties of the ground corpses, thought to be a cure-all for a variety of ills. In the early 17th century, John Greaves measured the pyramids and published the illustrated *Pyramidographia* in 1646, while the scientist-priest Athanasius Kircher was the first to establish a link between Egyptian hieroglyphs and the modern Coptic languages, for which he is considered a founder of Egyptology.

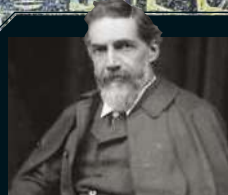
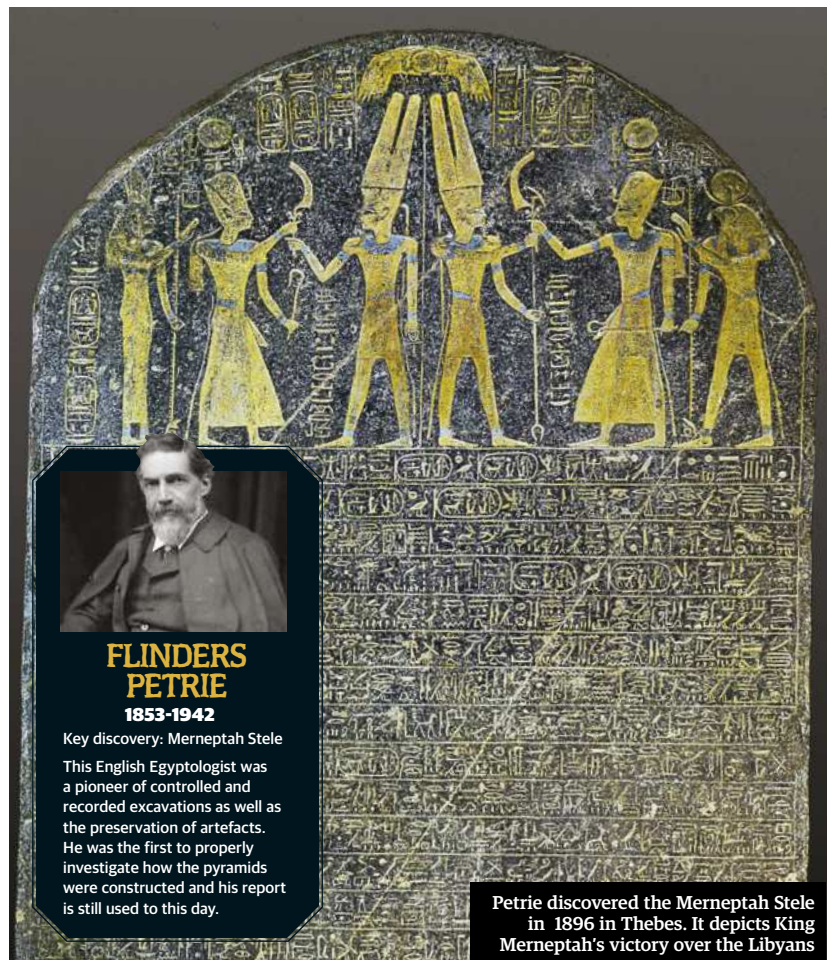
During the Enlightenment, scholarly attention became more systematic. However, the wars of the French Revolution made a voyage across the Mediterranean much harder and travel to Egypt declined. In 1797, Danish archaeologist Georg Zoëga wrote: "If Egypt becomes more accessible, and the numerous ancient monuments that are to be seen there are carefully studied and documented, perhaps future generations will someday read the hieroglyphs and understand what those mysterious monuments mean." That day was to come much sooner than he ever could have expected.



**HOWARD CARTER**  
1874-1939

Key discoveries: Tombs of Thutmose I, Thutmose III and Tutankhamun

A student of Flinders Petrie, Carter first went to Egypt as an artist, recording tomb wall reliefs. While doing so, he supervised a number of excavations at Thebes and was eventually given funding for his own projects.



**FLINDERS PETRIE**  
1853-1942

Key discovery: Merneptah Stele

This English Egyptologist was a pioneer of controlled and recorded excavations as well as the preservation of artefacts. He was the first to properly investigate how the pyramids were constructed and his report is still used to this day.

Petrie discovered the Merneptah Stele in 1896 in Thebes. It depicts King Merneptah's victory over the Libyans



# Modern Egyptology

With the discovery and decipherment of The Rosetta Stone came a new sense of intrigue and interest in Ancient Egypt soared

**T**he birth of modern Egyptology in the early 19th century was motivated not by scholarship, but by politics. In 1798, the French Republic was at war with Britain. Unable to target it directly, the French chose to instead seize Egypt, thus breaking Britain's overland communications with the jewel in its crown, India, while at the same time gaining France a valuable colony. An army of 17,000 led by Napoleon Bonaparte landed near Alexandria on 1 July and quickly captured the town. With them were 150 civilians who made up the Commission of Sciences and Arts, chosen for their abilities to assess Egypt and develop it into a prosperous province.

Instead, it was Egyptian antiquity that interested them the most. In 1799, the French Expedition made a discovery that would change Egyptology forever. A group of soldiers working on fortifications near the town of Rashid, or Rosetta, uncovered a large, irregularly shaped stone. One of its faces was inscribed with different scripts:

hieroglyphics on the top, Greek on the bottom, and a third, which became known as Demotic, in the middle. The Greek portion was translated, revealing that each script held the same message. The Rosetta Stone, as it became known, could therefore be used to translate hieroglyphics. However, the Greek and Egyptian texts are not the same word for word, and much of the hieroglyphic portion is damaged or incomplete. Therefore, the Rosetta Stone played only a small role in the decipherment of hieroglyphs, but it ushered in an Egyptology boom that began today's fascination with Egypt.

After French scholar Jean-Francois Champollion succeeded in deciphering the Rosetta text, and further advancements were made in understanding its language and writing system, the study of ancient Egyptian civilisation became much easier. Egyptology became more professional via the work of Egyptologists like Flinders Petrie, who introduced techniques of field preservation, recording, and excavating. In 1880, Flinders Petrie



**“The Rosetta Stone played only a small role”**



**ZAHÍ  
HAWASS**  
1947-present

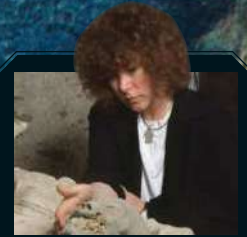
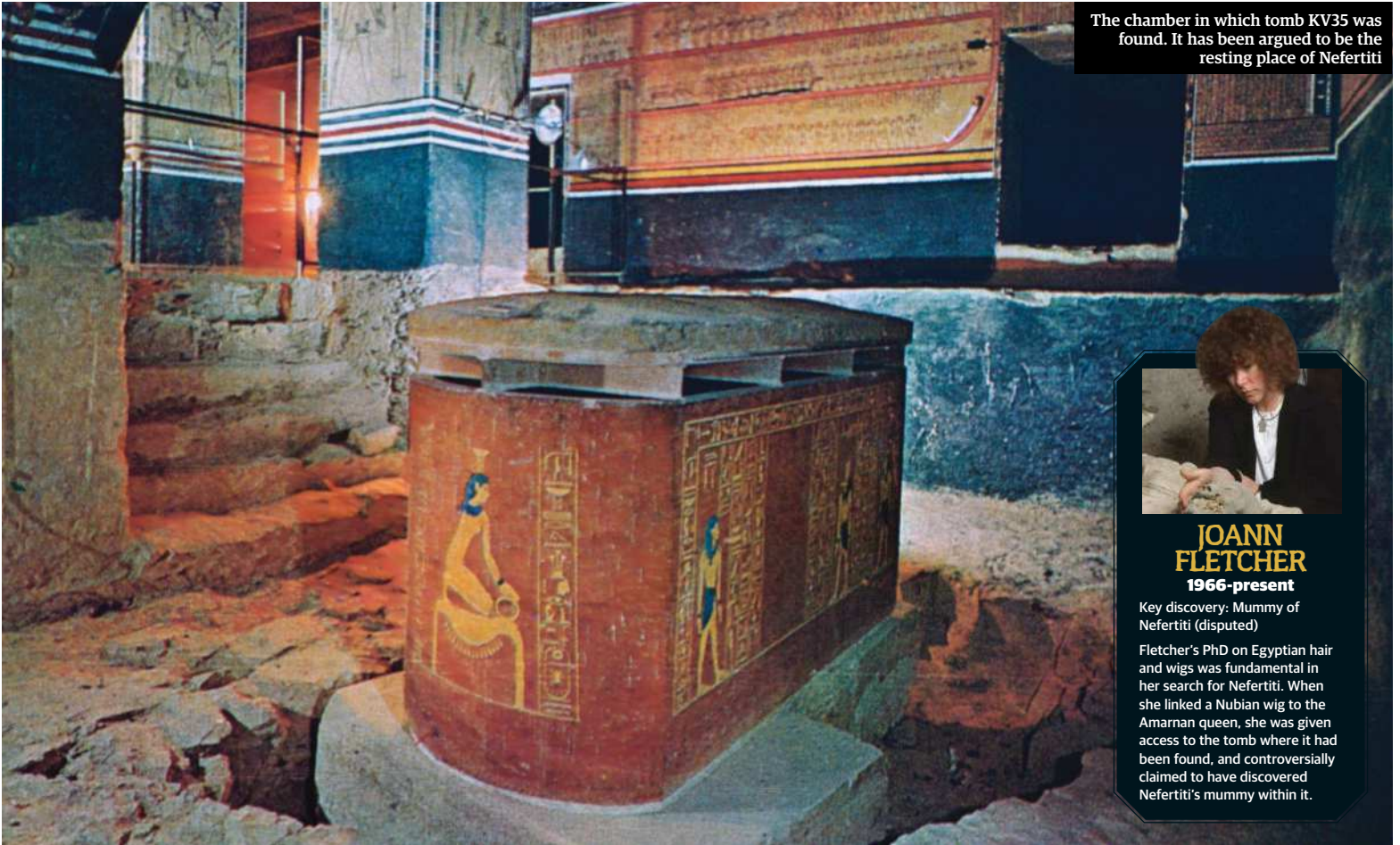
Key discoveries: Mummy of Hatshepsut, mummy of Queen Tiye, Valley of the Golden Mummies

Formerly the Egyptian Minister of State for Antiquities Affairs, Hawass is now Egypt's leading archaeologist. Despite this, he has been the subject of much scandal and criticism, and was sentenced to prison for allegedly smuggling antiquities.



**Hawass uncovering the secrets of the Valley of the Golden Mummies**





**JOANN FLETCHER**  
1966-present

Key discovery: Mummy of Nefertiti (disputed)

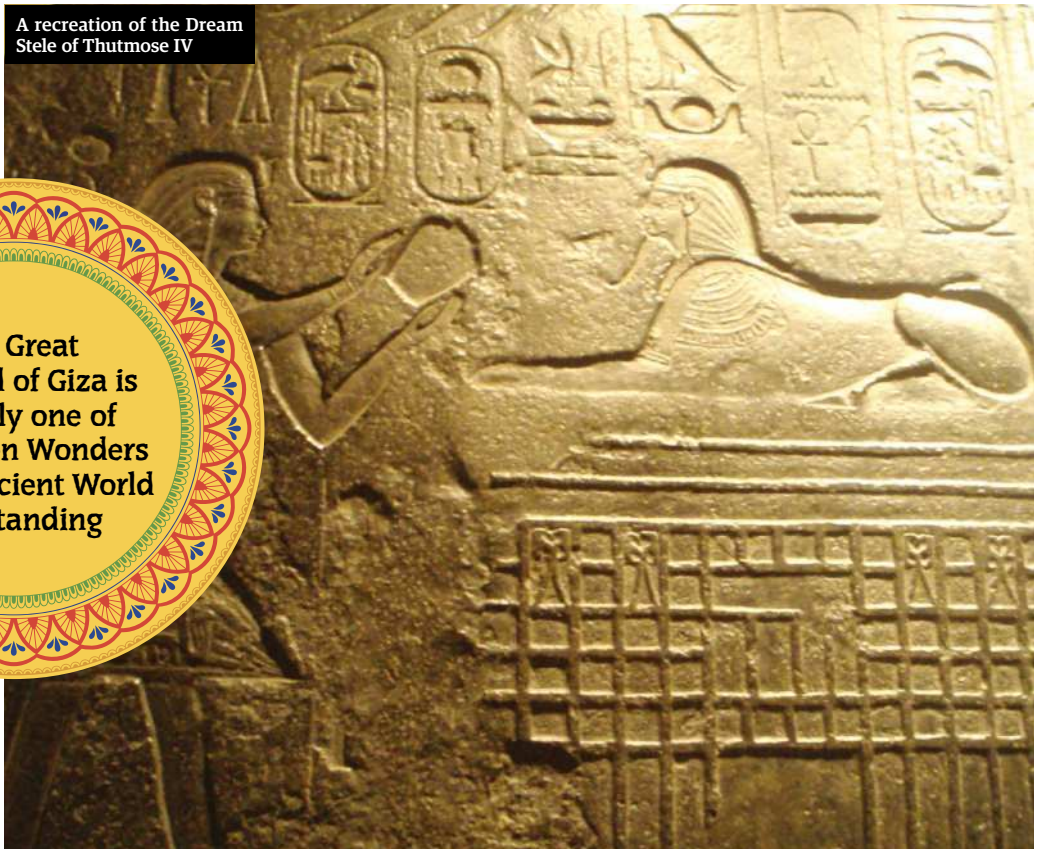
Fletcher's PhD on Egyptian hair and wigs was fundamental in her search for Nefertiti. When she linked a Nubian wig to the Amarnan queen, she was given access to the tomb where it had been found, and controversially claimed to have discovered Nefertiti's mummy within it.

revolutionised the field of archaeology through controlled and scientifically recorded excavations and determined that Egyptian culture dated back as early as 4500 BCE. The British Egypt Exploration Fund was founded in 1882 and other Egyptologists promoted Flinders Petrie's methods.

Flinders Petrie was also responsible for training a new generation of Egyptologists, who would come to study and excavate Egypt in its 'golden age of discovery'. One of these was Howard Carter. His 1922 discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb spawned the beginning of a reaction dubbed 'Egyptomania', which would go on to last until World War II, influencing art and design and inspiring novelists and film directors alike to write stories based on the ancient kingdom.

While the craze died down after the war, the 1978 Tutankhamun tour sparked new interest that remains to this day, as the vast swathes of documentaries and books about Egypt prove. It seems that Ancient Egypt will remain fascinating for many millennia to come.

A recreation of the Dream Stele of Thutmose IV

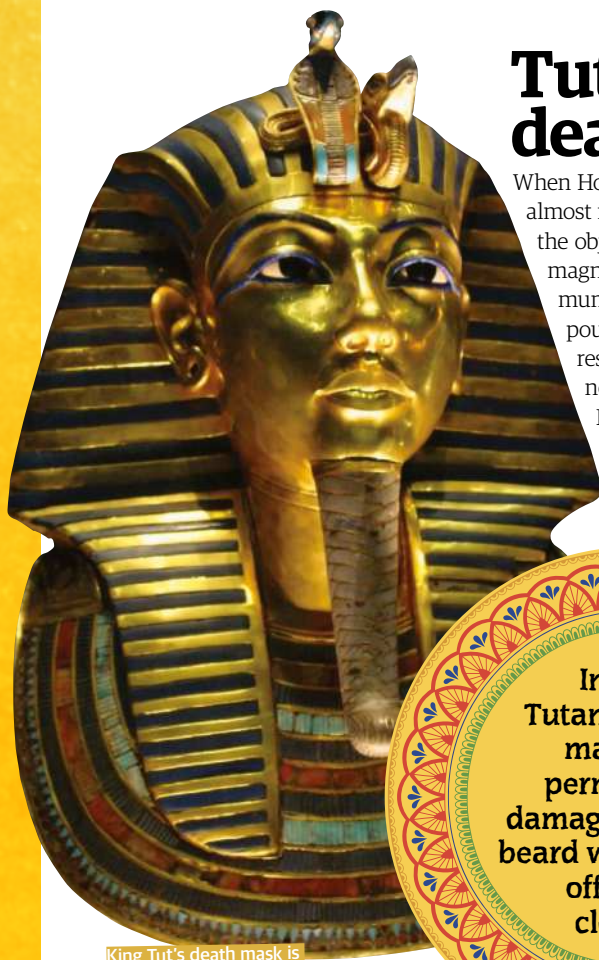


**The Great Pyramid of Giza is the only one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World still standing**



# Treasures of Ancient Egypt

These ancient artefacts are now some of the most valuable in the world, and have helped us piece together the puzzle of Egypt



King Tut's death mask is made of solid gold and inlaid with semi-precious stones

## Tutankhamun's death mask 1922

When Howard Carter and Lord Carnarvon discovered the almost intact tomb of the Egyptian boy king Tutankhamun, the object that received the most attention was the magnificent death mask they found placed over the mummy's head. This is solid gold and weighs about 24 pounds. Although it is difficult to judge how much it resembles the young pharaoh himself, the narrow eyes, nose, lips and chin all match the features of his mummy. Because of the discovery of this stunning artefact, Tutankhamun has become the most recognisable pharaoh in Egyptian history, and the mask itself has become a symbol for Ancient Egypt and Egyptology around the world..

In 2015, Tutankhamun's mask was permanently damaged when its beard was knocked off during cleaning



This statue of the goddess Isis was discovered in Heracleion

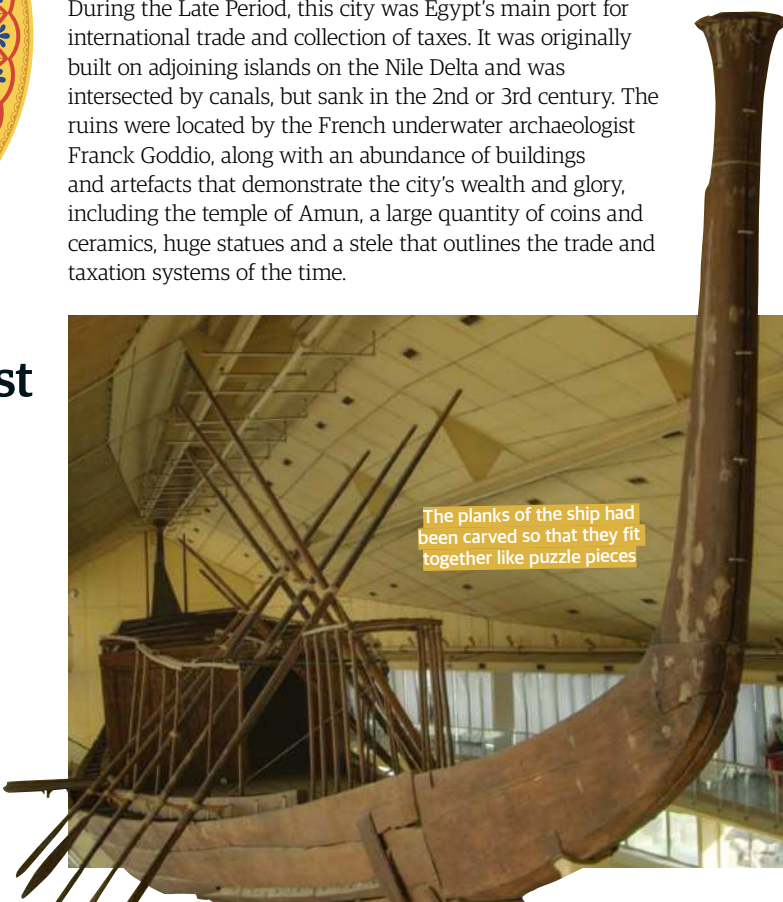
## Heracleion 2000

During the Late Period, this city was Egypt's main port for international trade and collection of taxes. It was originally built on adjoining islands on the Nile Delta and was intersected by canals, but sank in the 2nd or 3rd century. The ruins were located by the French underwater archaeologist Franck Goddio, along with an abundance of buildings and artefacts that demonstrate the city's wealth and glory, including the temple of Amun, a large quantity of coins and ceramics, huge statues and a stele that outlines the trade and taxation systems of the time.

**"Because of his death mask, Tutankhamun has become the most recognisable pharaoh in Egyptian history, and the mask itself has become a symbol for Egyptology"**

## Khufu ship 1954

This full-size Egyptian barge was discovered in a pit at the foot of the Great Pyramid of Giza. It was built around 2500 BCE, most likely for the pharaoh Khufu of the Old Kingdom, to transport his body to the afterlife. The Khufu ship is one of the oldest, largest and best-preserved vessels from antiquity, measuring more than 40 metres long. It was identified as the world's oldest intact ship and has been described as 'a masterpiece of woodcraft' that could sail today if put into water. The ship was one of two rediscovered in 1954 by Kamal el-Mallakh.



The planks of the ship had been carved so that they fit together like puzzle pieces



## Valley of the Golden Mummies 1996

This huge burial site at Bahariya Oasis, dating to the Greco-Roman period, was discovered by Zahi Hawass and his Egyptian team. Approximately 250 2,000-year-old mummies were recovered over several months. There were four different styles of mummy found, including gold-gilded ones. These have a gilded mask covering the face and a gilded waistcoat depicting different scenes of gods and goddesses, hence why the name 'golden mummies' was given.



One of the mummies found in the Valley of the Golden Mummies



The bust of Nefertiti is part of the Egyptian Museum of Berlin collection, currently on display in the Neues Museum

## Nefertiti's bust 1912

The limestone bust of Nefertiti, the Great Royal Wife of the 18th Dynasty pharaoh Akhenaten, is one of the most iconic and most copied works of Ancient Egypt. It was discovered by a team led by German archaeologist Ludwig Borchardt, who was overseeing the excavation of an Amarnan sculptor's workshop. Since then, the artefact has been housed in Germany. However it has not been resting peacefully there; it has been the subject of much controversy, with allegations over its authenticity. There have also been demands made for it to be returned to its home in Egypt.

There is an ongoing campaign to return 5,000 Egyptian artefacts to their homeland, including Nefertiti's bust

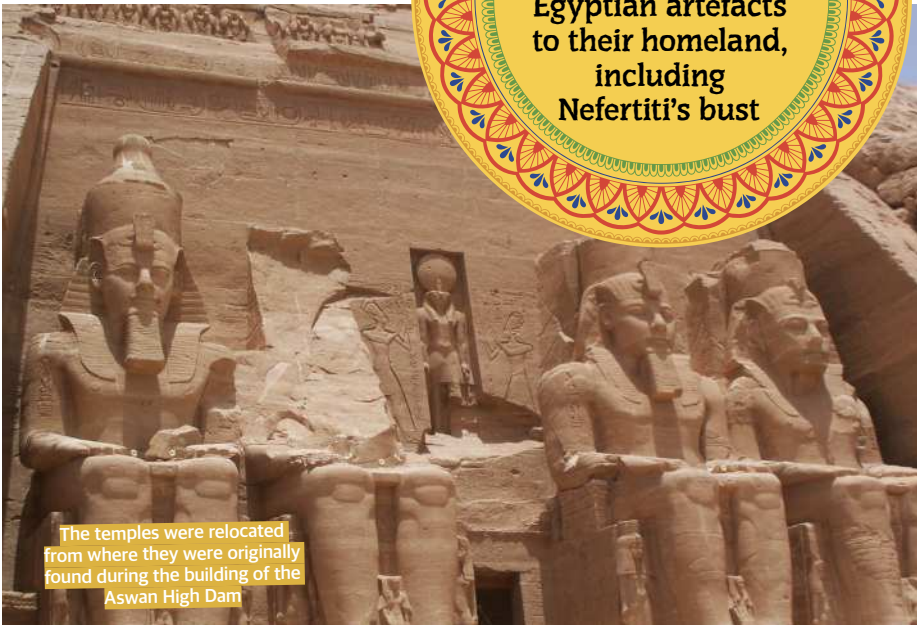
**"Its wall paintings were in excellent condition"**

## Tomb of Seti I 1817

Tomb KV17 is the tomb of pharaoh Seti I, and was first discovered in the Valley of the Kings by an Italian explorer named Giovanni Battista Belzoni in 1817. Its wall paintings were in excellent condition and some of the artists' paints and brushes had been left on the floor, making it one of the best preserved tombs in Egypt. However, it was damaged when Jean-François Champollion, the translator of the Rosetta Stone, removed a large wall panel from the tomb during his expedition in 1828-29.



The wall paintings inside the tomb of Seti I were found in excellent condition

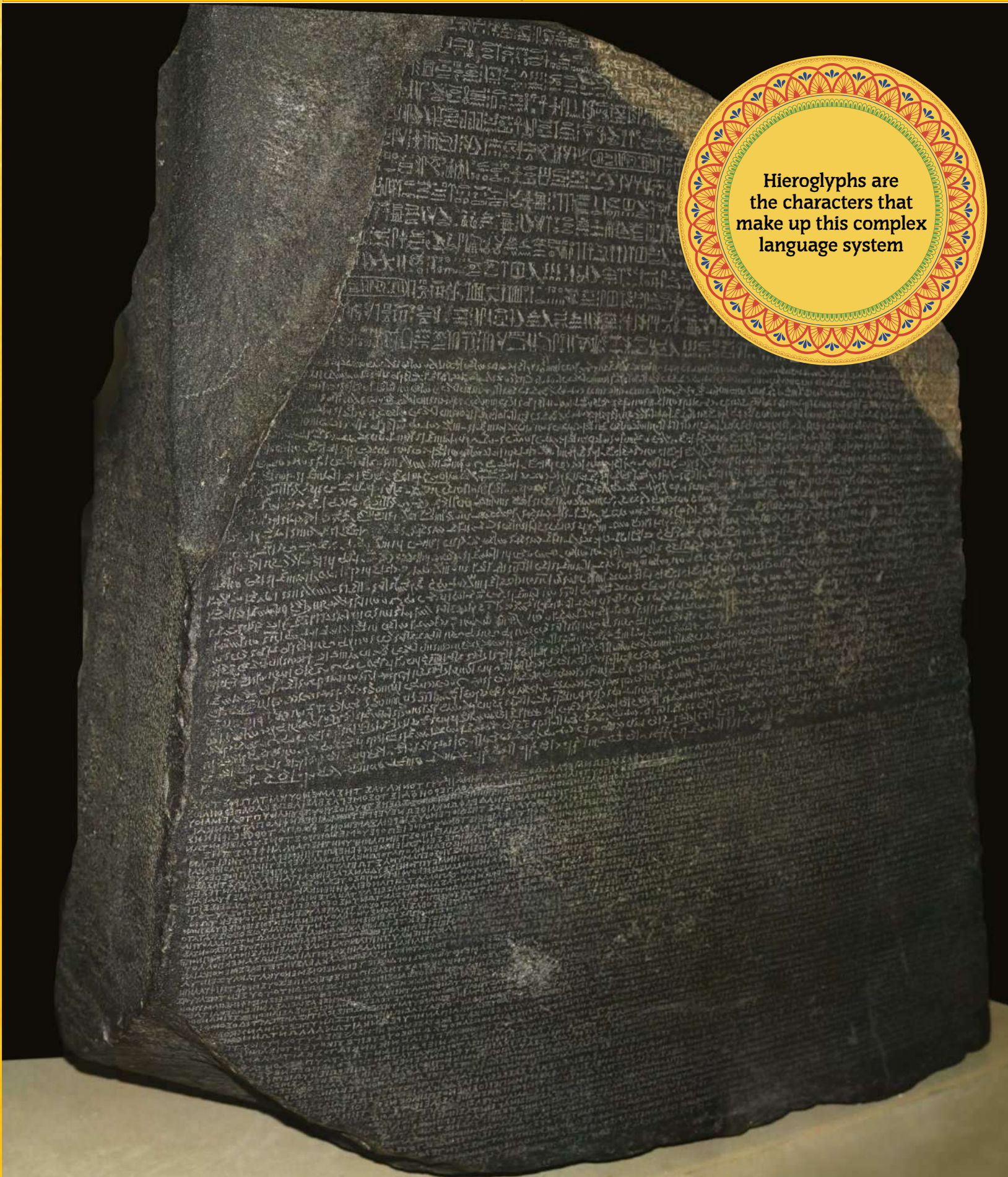


The temples were relocated from where they were originally found during the building of the Aswan High Dam

## Abu Simbel temples 1813

These two huge temples were originally carved out of the mountainside during the reign of Pharaoh Ramesses II, as a monument to himself and his queen Nefertari. Over time, the temples fell into disuse and eventually became covered by sand. They were forgotten until 1813, when Swiss orientalist Jean-Louis Burckhardt found the top frieze of the main temple. Burckhardt told Giovanni Belzoni of his finding, and in 1817 he succeeded in excavating the site.





Hieroglyphs are the characters that make up this complex language system



# Decoding the hieroglyphics

How the most mundane of demolition jobs led to a discovery that would go on to unlock the secrets of a much admired ancient society

**T**he written language of Ancient Egypt is a visually enchanting form and, as such, it has held understandable allure in the imaginations of scholars and non-scholars alike. It's a written language that just seems so very different to anything that we recognise in modern times. The hieroglyphs attest to the human capacity for invention, creative flair and the desire to express as precisely as possible what we think and feel, and perceive in our immediate and less immediate circumstances. Just what do all of those carved images mean, though? Who wouldn't enjoy solving such a puzzle?

Imagine, then, being part of the race to crack the code of a mysterious language that dated back several thousand years. Imagine the excitement when the opportunity to finally do so presented itself right on the cusp of the 19th century, when the Age of Enlightenment had established its intellectual territory and the thirst for evidence-based enquiry in the pursuit of knowledge had taken hold of the world. The discovery of the Rosetta Stone was a huge moment in an era of thought and intellectual activity. And, in working out what the fascinating inscriptions on the Rosetta Stone meant, the modern world would be compelled to reconnect with an ancient world. In a time in which emerging rational modes of thought were developing, they interwove with the intricate spiritual and religious tenets and narratives of a culture beginning to be rediscovered.

There is always a thrill to be found in cracking a code. Can you imagine, then, the excitement that rolled like a wave across the archaeological and scholarly community when the realisation was reached about the nature of the tablet that had been discovered? Picture the moment in the Egyptian desert in 1799. French soldiers, led by Pierre François Xavier Bouchard, under the auspices of Napoleon Bonaparte, unearth a chunk of granite rock that measures 112 centimetres in height, 75 centimetres in width and is 28.4 centimetres thick.

Over the next quarter of a century, English and French scholars worked tirelessly to decode the treasure. This type of scholarly competition reflected something of the much broader tension that had existed between France and Britain at the time. In an attempt to weaken Britain, Napoleon had decided on an offensive on British claims in Egypt in order to disrupt Britain's hugely successful venture in North Africa and emerging connections to India.

The artefact was named the Rosetta Stone after El Rashid – the location in the Nile Delta, just about 35 miles north of Alexandria, where it was discovered. And this inconspicuous chunk of granite rock has become a globally recognised archaeological treasure. Relatively swiftly after its discovery, it granted access to the thought- and idea-scape, daily life and religious systems of a culture that has entranced and energised people's

imaginings for centuries. The Rosetta Stone, then, provided something of a quantum leap by allowing scholars to understand with great clarity, and then share, the story of Ancient Egypt.

The Stone itself did not narrate the history of Ancient Egypt or anything equally expansive. No: the stone itself records a public decree made by the teenage pharaoh, Ptolemy V. However, this very particular text would eventually allow translators to work out the linguistic system on which Egyptian writing was based. It became the key to unlocking a long-lost corridor of knowledge through to the time of the Ancient Egyptians. We use that term to distinguish the culture from an even older civilisation that had developed around the River Nile. As Dr Penelope Wilson has commented, "Ancient Egyptian is classed by linguists as an Afro-Asiatic language. This means that it is related to North African languages such as Berber and Cushitic, and to Asiatic (or Semitic) languages, such as Arabic and Hebrew."

In 1810, the Royal Society of Antiquaries in London published a document entitled Rosetta Stone, brought to England in 1802: account of by Matt. Raper. Among the documents contained in the account was a letter dated 30 May 1810, written by Major General H Turner to Nicholas Carlisle, Secretary to the Society of Antiquaries that: "By the 16th article of the capitulation of Alexandria, the siege of which city terminated the labours of the British army in Egypt, all the curiosities, natural



## SACRED AND ORDINARY EXPRESSION

Writing is an act of recording thought, perception, value systems, memories, aspirations and fears. It's a way of encompassing all of the inner, and outer, worlds of human experience. For Ancient Egyptian culture, writing was certainly a way to record the history of the royal family. Writing was committed to both stone and to papyrus, and archaeology has gifted us with what are referred to as the 'Hekanakhte Papers', which detail aspects of agricultural life in the form of letters written on papyrus by a farmer to his family during a period when he was away from home.

A subject typically committed to written memory was spells. Egypt was a culture that, to some degree, combined an affinity for magic with a fascination for the world of reason and evidence-based thought and investigation. One of the key texts that somehow survived the immense passage of human history was *The Book of the Dead*, dating from the 16th Dynasty, which was discovered in the coffin of Queen Mentuhotep. *The Book of the Dead* powerfully combines writing and illustration for a culture that embraced the sombre reality of death and the importance of a disciplined and ordered life. *The Book of the Dead* is comprised of 200 spells written with the intention of helping the deceased negotiate the challenges of reaching the afterlife.

and artificial, collected by the French Institute and others, were to be delivered up to the captors (the British)... From the French scavans I learnt, that the Rosetta Stone was found among the ruins of Fort St Julien..."

This Royal Society of Antiquaries report also includes the Rev Stephen Weston's analysis of his translation of a section of the Greek text included in the decree recorded on the stone. Weston's report certainly provides a very full sense of the issues that a king would typically engage with and provides us with a detailed sense of the conditions in which the people of Ancient Egypt lived. Weston's translation is entirely fascinating, so it's feasible to quote an excerpt from any part and find interest in it. However, here is a selection from Weston's translation, as it was published in the RSA's account: "[Ptolemy] dealt out justice to all, like the great, great Hermes. He ordered also that all men who came back to their country

in arms, and all disaffected persons who returned to Egypt in times of confusion should remain on their own estates."

During the 18th century, European scholars committed themselves to decoding and deciphering the hieroglyphs available from excavated and found ruins of Ancient Egypt.

At a time of increasing modernisation in the world, hieroglyphs began to exert significant force on the imagination of scholars.

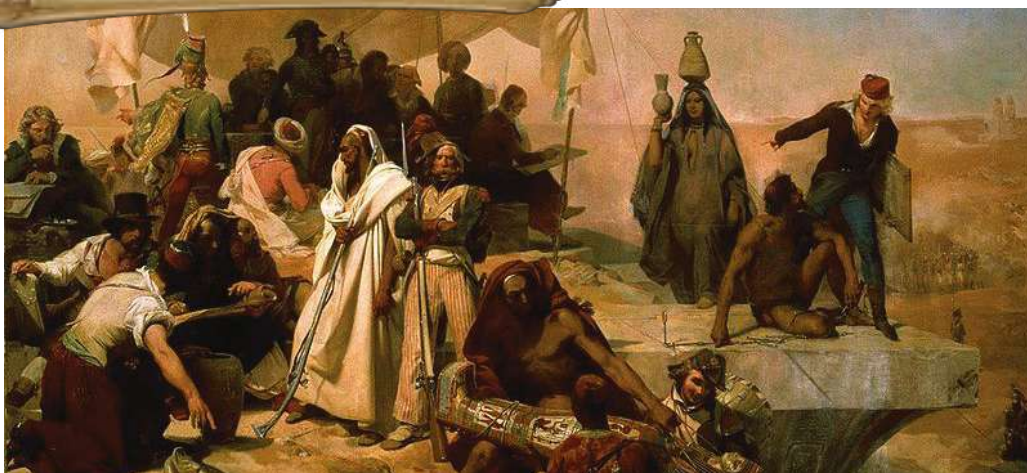
In part, hieroglyphs were a language of mysticism. As the British Museum notes about the scholastic culture of the 18th century, "People think that hieroglyphs were symbols recording ideas rather than the sounds of a spoken language."

For the people of Ancient Egypt, their name for hieroglyphic marks was 'the divine word'. Their belief was that Thoth, the god

of wisdom, had bestowed on them the ability to write. Hieroglyph is a word that comes to us from Ancient Greece and it means 'sacred carvings'. Certainly, plenty of Greek scholars and travellers ventured across the Mediterranean to Egypt. Some scholars have proposed that Egyptian writing began in about 4000 BCE, evolving from writing that was already being practised by that time in Mesopotamia - a region comprising Assyria, Babylonia and Sumer and considered as 'the cradle of civilisation'. Today, we know this region as Iraq. However, because the written forms are so different, other scholars have proposed that Egyptian hieroglyphs developed independently of Mesopotamian writing.

Over 700 signs comprise the building blocks of Egyptian hieroglyphic expression, and the Rosetta Stone allowed scholars to fast evolve their facility to translate the hieroglyphs. The Rosetta Stone includes six identical cartouches, and it was this

There are over 700 characters or letters in the hieroglyphic alphabet compared to 26 in the English language



## The Rosetta Stone: discovery to decipherment

### Foiled!

The French army is prevented, by a British blockade, from leaving Alexandria with the newly discovered Rosetta Stone.

1799

### Proof!

Jean-Joseph Marcel creates the very first proof sheets of the Stone and they are sent to the National Institute in Paris.

January 1800

### International interest

Baron Silvestre de Sacy studies a copy of the Stone's Greek text. He writes a letter of his findings to the French Ministry of the Interior.

1801

### Taking the credit

English scholars seek to underplay the French contribution to the Rosetta Stone's decoding. A French translation of the text on the Stone is produced.

1800-1802

### Back to England

The British take possession of the Rosetta Stone from the French after the latter surrender Egypt. A Latin translation of the Stone is made.

1801

### Pioneering effort

The Stone arrives in England in February 1802. Reverend Stephen Weston completes the first English translation of the Greek text on the Stone.

1802



detail that would draw the attention of Thomas Young when he set about attempting to understand what the treasure was telling the world that had rediscovered it. Young's 'rival', the historian and linguist Jean-François Champollion, would go on to identify that some of the writing was an alphabet and other parts served a syllabic function. He also found that some text was determinative, meaning that it represented an entire idea or object that had already been described.

The hieroglyphic language of Ancient Egypt is a time machine that takes us back to 5000 BCE when the first versions of this language system were marked by hunter communities in the Western Desert of Egypt. In these very earliest hieroglyphs we see depictions of cattle and farmers and the motivation behind recording aspects of their lives was to memorialise these details of life that held most importance for them.

Key to understanding hieroglyphs is recognising that they function as ideograms. Ideograms are, as Egyptologist Ian Shaw explains, "signs employed as direct representations of phenomena such as 'sky'



The decree issued on behalf of Ptolemy V is inscribed on the Rosetta Stone, from top to bottom, in Ancient Egyptian, Demotic and Greek

## ROSETTA GO-GETTERS

Two decades after its discovery, two scholars undertook the intellectual adventure to unlock the rock



Thomas Young



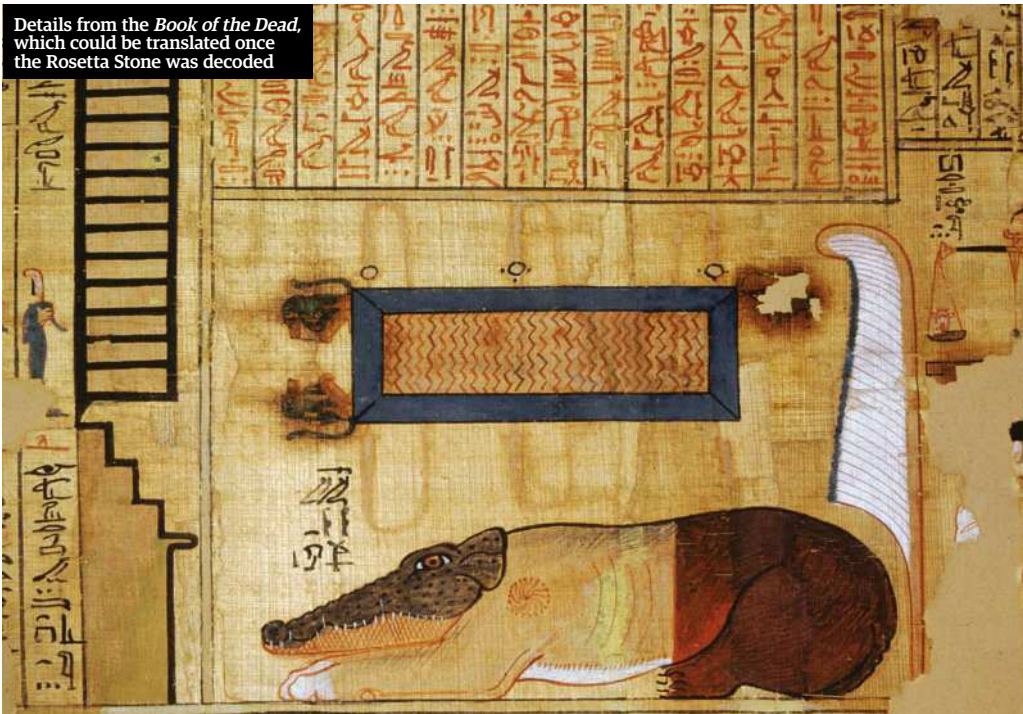
Jean-Francois Champollion

At the heart of the race of intellectuals scrutinising the Rosetta Stone was the rivalry between Thomas Young, an English physicist, fascinated by Ancient Egypt, and French scholar and linguist Jean-François Champollion. Young was such a bright young thing that he had even earned the nickname of 'Phenomenon', having discovered the wave properties of light before proceeding to illuminate the world on the subject of Ancient Egypt.

For many involved in decoding the Rosetta Stone, Young shared their understanding that the hieroglyphs were a form of picture writing. In an attempt to develop a more thorough understanding of the past's granite gift to the present, in 1814 Young focused his efforts on a single cartouche. He was able to cross-reference the cartouche with the Greek script, judging that the Egyptian writing was referring to the late era pharaoh, Ptolemy V. The specific was allowing Young to think more universally: Young described his breakthrough work in an article for the 1819 edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

It was Champollion, however, who achieved a full translation of the hieroglyphic material. Champollion's lecture of 10 May 1831 was a critical moment, in which he observed that: "The translation of [the Greek], which contains a decree issued by the priests of Egypt, who had gathered in Memphis to render homage to King Ptolemy Epiphanes, made it completely certain that the two Egyptian inscriptions on the upper part of the stone contained the truthful expression of the same decree in Egyptian language."

Details from the *Book of the Dead*, which could be translated once the Rosetta Stone was decoded



© Alamy

### Text message

British scholars send copies of the stone to The Vatican, the Society de Propaganda Fide, the Imperial Library in Vienna and the Academy at Madrid.

**July 1802**

### Alphabet breakthrough

Swedish diplomat and scholar Johan David Åkerblad compiles a rudimentary Egyptian 'alphabet' and a list of Greek and Egyptian proper names as they appear on the Rosetta Stone.

**1802/03**

### The Phenomenon

Thomas Young commences work translating the Stone. He determines that the direction in which hieroglyphs are looking indicates the direction in which one should read them.

**1814**

### Young's report

Thomas Young publishes his research in the Supplement to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. The research is 20 pages long and simply entitled 'Egypt'.

**1819**

### Pushing the envelope

On 10 May 1831, Jean-François Champollion commences delivery of his course on archaeology at the College de France, with his first lecture focused on his analysis of the Stone.

**1831**

### Where's home?

Debates regarding ownership of the Rosetta Stone have been ongoing since its discovery. Egypt wishes to have the Rosetta Stone repatriated.

**Ongoing**



## THE JOURNEY TO INTERPRETING THE ROSETTA STONE

### Summer 1798

Napoleon Bonaparte's army engages in an attempt to defeat British troops in Egypt. Napoleon is also interested in the archaeology of the North African country, and a thousand civilians set to work to unearth what treasures might be hidden from view. On 24 July, Napoleon enters the Egyptian capital and on 22 August establishes The Institute of Egypt with a focus on four disciplines: Mathematics, Physics, Political Economy, and Literature and the Arts.

### 19 July 1799

Fort Juliet, near the city named El Rashid. Soldiers are expanding the size of the fort and in undertaking this work they demolish an ancient wall. French officer Pierre François Xavier Bouchard supervises the work. The discovery of a stone is made on Bouchard's watch. The stone is damaged. It is missing the corner of its upper left-hand section. Initial research into the stone is commenced during that summer.

### September 1799

The *Courier de l'Egypte* publishes the first publicly available news of the discovery of the Rosetta Stone. The article draws together initial research undertaken at the Institute of Egypt. Scholars Jean-Joseph Marcel and Remi Raige determine the cursive Demotic text on the stone, but at this stage cannot decipher it. In August 1800, study on the stone begins at the Institute of Egypt in Cairo. Inevitably, perhaps, arguments quickly begin to develop around ownership of the treasure.

### 1801

In 1801, with the British having defeated Napoleon's army in Egypt, the Rosetta Stone arrives at the British Museum in London, where scholars then continue to study it. The Greek text is readily translated and scholars identify that each section narrates the same information. This is a critical realisation: it means that the scholars understand that they will be able to translate the meaning of the hieroglyphs. The Rosetta Stone records a decree from pharaoh Ptolemy V that dates from 196 BCE.



or 'man') as well as phonetic signs representing the sound of all or part of a spoken word..."

Hieroglyphs didn't only provide factual information. They also allowed for creative and artistic expression and interpretation. Indeed, some hieroglyphs are described as 'determinative' because a given hieroglyph determines the full meaning. Hieroglyphs were most particularly used on temples and the great public buildings and monuments of Ancient Egypt. They ceased being used beyond the Fourth century BCE and, by virtue of becoming rare, they took on a special resonance and cultural value as a 'lost' language.

The Rosetta Stone comprises three types of writing, each of which recorded what has been entitled The Memphis Decree. Having been the capital city of Ancient Egypt, Memphis was located just south of the Nile Delta, 15 miles to the south of Cairo. The contents of the decree refer to the young pharaoh Ptolemy V, who the Greek text describes as follows: "King Ptolemy, living for ever, the Manifest God whose excellence is fine..." It continues in Egyptian hieroglyphs in the uppermost section; the middle section shows Demotic Egyptian writing (used for document writing rather than writing about sacred subjects); and the lowest third shows Ancient Greek text. The Rosetta Stone is a veritable search engine of the Ancient Egyptian time.

Professor Kathryn A Bard has explained that Egyptian writing was borne out of royal administrative requirements. Widely understood to have been written by priests at Memphis, the Stone outlines the numerous benefactions decreed by Ptolemy V during the ninth

year of his reign. As such, the text on the Rosetta Stone commemorates Ptolemy's reign.

Historical research and scholarship, like scientific enquiry, builds and develops on what has come before - and, as in science, even long-standing theories can, necessarily, be shown to be inadequate and developed into new concepts. When work began on deciphering the hieroglyphic content of the Rosetta Stone, scholars took some confidence from their already well-established understanding of Greek.

Critical to our thinking about how hieroglyphs functioned in their place and time is to know that they were considered to possess power enough to affect the world.

**Only the educated scribes were able to write using hieroglyphs. They used shorthand 'hieratic' writing**

It's certainly true that some discoveries don't necessarily get the recognition during the original moment in time, and the unearthing of a slate-like stone in 1898 by British Egyptologists James Quibbell and Frederick Green failed to capture the general public's imagination in the way that the discovery of the Rosetta Stone had done, or the visually spectacular King Tutankhamun death mask would later do. The slate stone, quickly named The Narmer Palette, was visually unassuming (to anyone except an antiquarian or Egyptologist) but has been of major importance, like the Rosetta Stone, in allowing us access to a culture's written expression of thought and how they saw and explained their lives.

What could be more of a testament to the Rosetta Stone's powerful effect on scholarship and on our imaginative response to Ancient Egypt than this: on 2 March 2004, the European Space Agency launched a spacecraft named Rosetta. On board rode a probe named Philae, which was programmed to land on a comet (which it achieved in late 2014). The impulse behind decoding an ancient civilisation has found another life in decoding the cosmos.



# Wondrous words revealed

Over 700 hieroglyphs can be combined to create endless meanings

**A**ncient Egyptian hieroglyphs would be written either from top to bottom across the surface of a page or of stone. Across the page, hieroglyphs would be written from right to left or from left to right. The key to reading a hieroglyph is this: if the ideograms of animals, birds or a person is facing left, then you must read from left to right. If the animal, bird or person faces right, then you must read across from right to left.



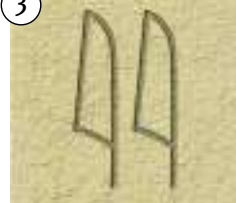
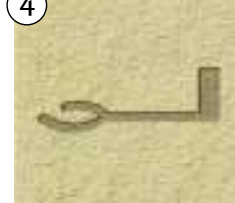


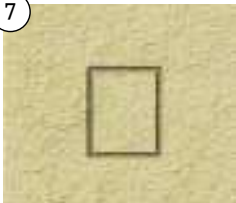
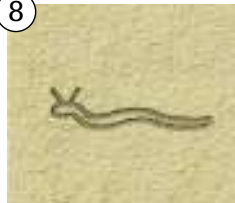

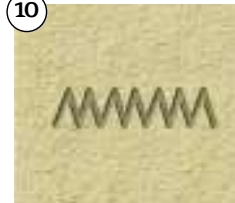
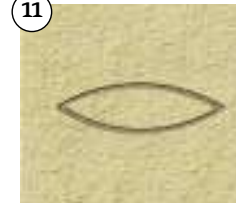
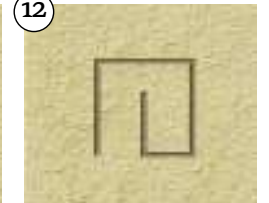
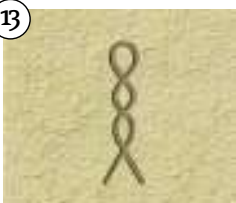
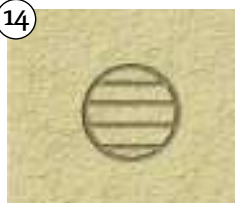
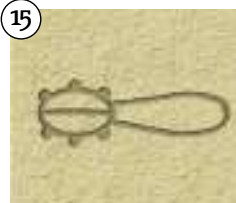
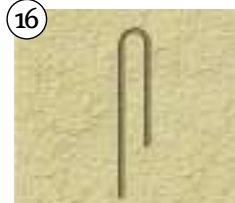
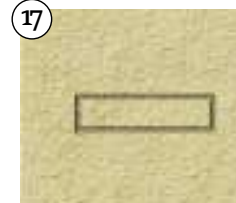

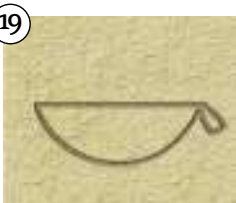

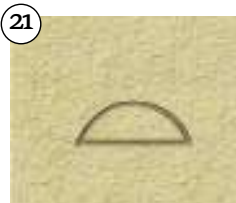
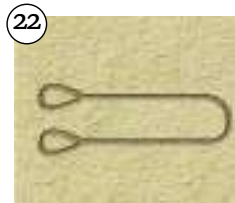
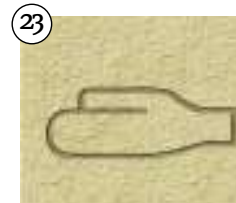
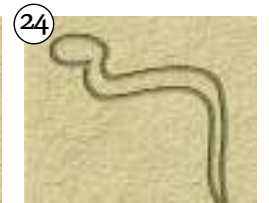
The hieroglyphic system uses over 700 signs. No vowels are shown in hieroglyphic form, only consonants. As the British Museum explains,

hieroglyphs function as "sense indicators, such as a boat following the sound *dpt* which was the word for boat." There was also a complementary form of writing called hieratic (by Egyptologists) and this was a cursive (joined) script used for writing on papyrus as a kind of shorthand.

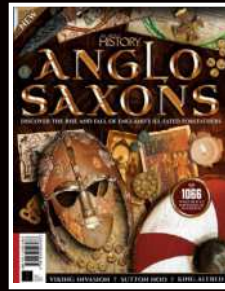
The alphabetic hieroglyphs comprise 24 'letters' represented by images of specific objects and entities. For example, a vulture represented the letter 'a'. In hieroglyphic text, any time that a royal name was being written, it was inscribed within an oval shape that we know as a cartouche.

Along the bottom of the cartouche was drawn a horizontal line; scholars have suggested that this represents the flat surface of the Earth and that the arc of the oval outline shows the journey of the sun through the course of a day. The cartouche form is an emblem of how a king's reign extended across the land (the flat line) over which the sun passes (the curve of the cartouche).

During the mid-Fourth Dynasty, hieroglyphic writing reached a particular level of refinement and was then used on monuments to write messages for public display.

- |  |   |  |  |   |  |
|--|---|--|--|---|--|
| <p>1</p>  <p><b>ʿ (‘ahhh’)</b><br/>Egyptian vulture. This ominous bird is associated with both battlefields and graveyards.</p>       | <p>2</p>  <p><b>i</b><br/>A flowering reed. The reed was used to make arrows and writing tools.</p>  | <p>3</p>  <p><b>y (‘eee’)</b><br/>Two flowering reeds or strokes that may have represented the sound of the wind on rushes.</p> | <p>4</p>  <p><b>c (e)</b><br/>The arm is often used in the Egyptian language to represent might or power.</p>                                  | <p>5</p>  <p><b>w (‘ooo’)</b><br/>The quail chick adds a pleasant sound. It is often employed among signs that represent time.</p> | <p>6</p>  <p><b>b</b><br/>The foot and leg. Egyptians became familiar with human anatomy through mummification.</p>   |
| <p>7</p>  <p><b>p</b><br/>A seat, stool or throne. A sign in Ancient Egyptian used frequently in royal titles.</p>                  | <p>8</p>  <p><b>f</b><br/>The horned viper is one of many snakes used in Ancient Egyptian. It is often attached to a verb.</p>                 | <p>9</p>  <p><b>m</b><br/>The owl is a common letter. It is rare to see the full face of any creature in imagery.</p>         | <p>10</p>  <p><b>n</b><br/>A water ripple is used to note transience; the words 'to' and 'towards' often contain this.</p>                   | <p>11</p>  <p><b>r</b><br/>R is shown as a mouth. The letter is used in the words 'recitation', 'to eat' or 'to speak'.</p>      | <p>12</p>  <p><b>h</b><br/>There are various 'h' sounds in the alphabet. This sign shows a rural shelter or a house.</p>                                      |
| <p>13</p>  <p><b>h (emphatic 'h')</b><br/>A twisted piece of flax. Flax was a common material in Ancient Egypt.</p>                 | <p>14</p>  <p><b>h (as in hock or lock)</b><br/>The placenta can be found in many words, including those that deal with fortune and smell.</p> | <p>15</p>  <p><b>h (‘ich’)</b><br/>The belly of an animal; this letter is used in words that denote the physical form.</p>    | <p>16</p>  <p><b>s</b><br/>A door bolt and a folded sheet of cloth. It sounds like the English 's'. It has several different variations.</p> | <p>17</p>  <p><b>s (‘sh’)</b><br/>Water features were a symbol of affluence; upper-class villas were designed with pools.</p>    | <p>18</p>  <p><b>k (like ‘qu’ in ‘quaint’)</b><br/>The hill sign is used in the words 'tall', 'high' and 'exalted', as well as 'high ground' or 'summit'.</p> |
| <p>19</p>  <p><b>k</b><br/>A reed basket with a handle. This can be used in many contexts and is employed as the pronoun 'you'.</p> | <p>20</p>  <p><b>g</b><br/>The Egyptians were fond of wine. The sign of this jar stand is transliterated with a hard 'g'.</p>                  | <p>21</p>  <p><b>t</b><br/>Bread was the most basic food in Egypt; here we see a small loaf of oven-baked bread.</p>          | <p>22</p>  <p><b>t (‘tsh’)</b><br/>Tethering rope. The Egyptians had 38 signs for ropes and baskets. 'T' is also a pronoun.</p>              | <p>23</p>  <p><b>d</b><br/>Human hand. There are 63 signs for the human body. This sign was used for words of action.</p>        | <p>24</p>  <p><b>d (dj)</b><br/>Snakes were feared creatures. This letter is often used in words of declaration or recitation.</p>                            |

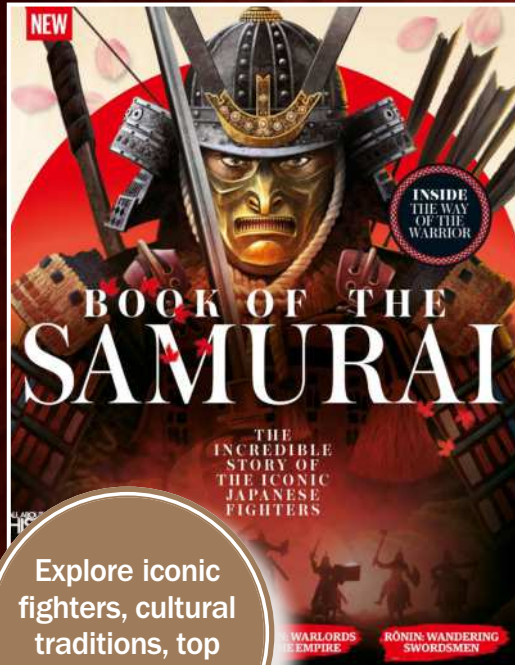
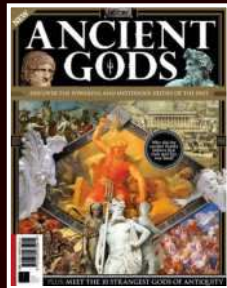
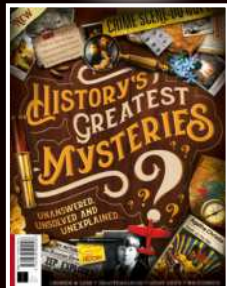




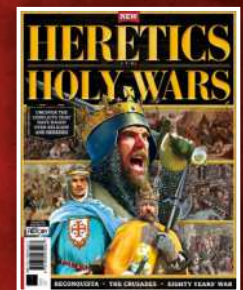
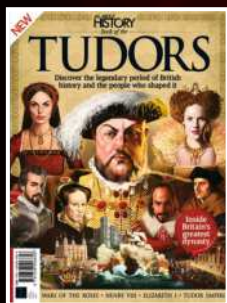
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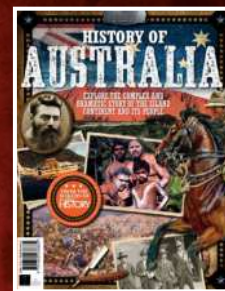
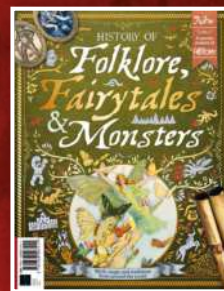
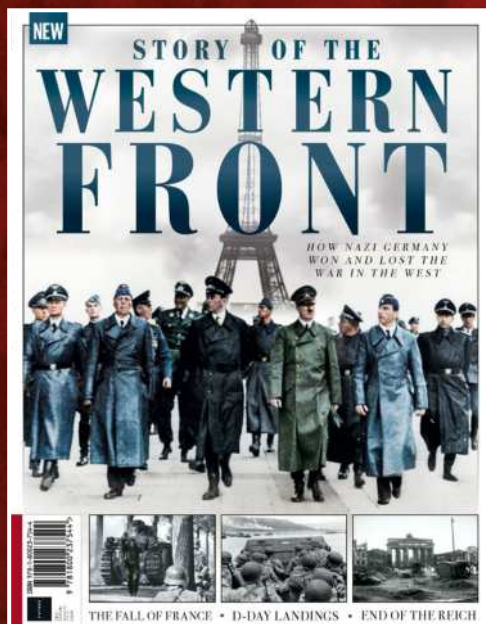
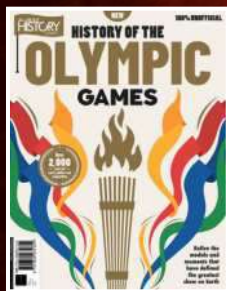


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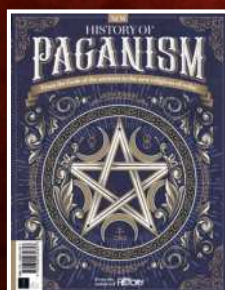
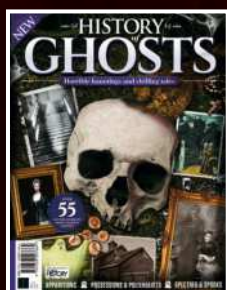
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CONQUERED  
EGYPT AND  
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**WHAT'S  
INSIDE A  
PYRAMID?**

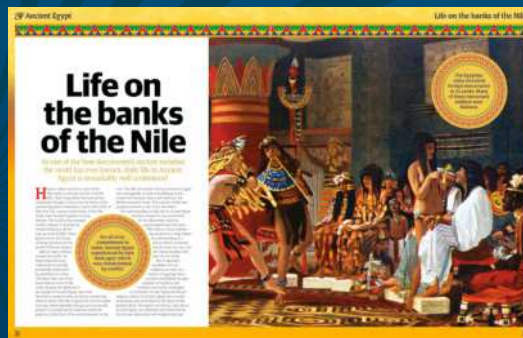
**WHY DID  
THEY  
MUMMIFY  
THEIR DEAD?**

**WHEN  
WAS THE  
KINGDOM  
FOUNDED?**



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WERE THE  
PHARAOHS?**

**WHO WERE  
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SACRED  
GODS?**

**HOW DO  
YOU READ  
HIEROGLYPHICS?**

